

# ROBERT GARIOCH AND ASPECTS OF THE SCOTTISH POETIC TRADITION

Andrew John Reid Macintosh

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil  
at the  
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by  
ANDREW JOHN REID MACINTOSH

JANUARY 2001



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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the work of Robert Garioch (1909–1981), and of his importance within the Scottish poetic tradition. It examines the way in which his reputation has suffered from too easy comparisons with Robert Fergusson, and seeks to reposition Garioch as a writer of greater breadth and depth than has often been acknowledged.

The thesis takes in the gamut of Garioch's writing and treats it as a whole. Chapter I examines Garioch's kinship with Robert Fergusson and suggests that the connection between the two poets, while important, has often been over-emphasised, and suggests other equally important influences and precursors, while acknowledging Garioch's originality. Chapter II deals with Garioch's writing about Edinburgh in poetry, prose and drama. Chapter III is concerned with the longer poems and their importance, while Chapter IV deals with the translations, especially those from George Buchanan and Guiseppe Belli, and underlines their significance. Chapter V looks at Garioch's relationship with other twentieth century writers in Scots—both with his contemporaries within and outwith the Lallans movement and with his predecessors.

By way of examining the whole of Garioch's work, including a significant number of his personal papers, and by contextualising it all, the thesis hopes to offer a more nuanced reading of Garioch's poetry, one which recognises his frequently undervalued poetic achievement.

## DECLARATIONS

- i I, Andrew J.R. Macintosh, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 40,500 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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- ii I was admitted as a student for the degree of Master of Letters in September 1998 and as a candidate for the degree of Master of Philosophy in July 1999; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between September 1998 and September 2000.

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- iii I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Master of Philosophy in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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The content of the thesis was influenced to a degree by discussions (in some cases formal interviews) with Edwin Morgan, George Elder Davie, Jamie Reid Baxter, Duncan Glen, Archie Turnbull, Billy Kay, Christopher Whyte and Bill Findlay. Christopher Whyte, Graham Tulloch and Bill Findlay were particularly keen to let me use material from a forthcoming book. The staffs of the University Libraries in St Andrews (particularly Ken Fraser, Jim Kidd and Christine Gascoigne) and Edinburgh, of the National Library of Scotland Manuscripts Department, of the Mitchell Library and of the National Television Archive were always generous with their time and helpful.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- ASLS Association for Scottish Literary Studies.
- CP Robert Garioch. *Collected Poems*. Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1977.
- CPW Robert Garioch. *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Robin Fulton. Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1983.
- CSD *Concise Scots Dictionary*. Edinburgh: Chambers, 1985.
- GM *A Garioch Miscellany*, ed. Robin Fulton. Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1986.
- NLS National Library of Scotland.
- SLJ Scottish Literary Journal.
- SP Robert Garioch. *Selected Poems*. Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1966.
- TLS *Times Literary Supplement*.

## INTRODUCTION

Sandy Moffat's painting *Poets' Pub* captures a generation of Scottish writers in the supposedly typical setting of an Edinburgh pub.<sup>1</sup> Seven of the poets are gathered round one table, with Hugh MacDiarmid and Sydney Goodsir Smith sitting in front of it, George Mackay Brown, Iain Crichton Smith and Sorley MacLean behind, Edwin Morgan sitting fascinated at one side and Norman MacCaig standing louchely at the other. Adjoining this colourful ensemble is Robert Garioch. He wears a shabby dark suit and leans uncomfortably on the adjacent table with his hands linked. His face wears an expression of disapproval. When asked about the imagery of this painting Garioch denied that this was a deliberate depiction of him as somewhat apart and aloof; rather 'the figures were arranged like that for the sake of the composition. I'm not withdrawn at all really and I like meeting people'.<sup>2</sup> The impression of characterlessness suggested by the painting seems deeply unfair, and is at odds with Garioch as recalled after his death by his close friend James Caird:

For a time he was even a meter reader for the Gas Board. He took a keen delight in doing the household shopping... That short, stocky, rather carelessly dressed figure, with balding greyish hair, wearing an old grey sweater, baggy trousers and a hat of uncertain age and shape, could be seen plodding up the precipitous streets of Edinburgh's New Town, his back turned to the snell north wind blowing in from the Firth of Forth, his shopping-bag laden with foodstuffs—occasionally pausing, his head quizzically inclining towards his right shoulder, to observe with his sharp and wary grey eyes anything untoward in his surroundings.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, Moffat's picture serves as an interesting allegory of Garioch's status in the canon of twentieth century Scottish literature. With the exception of Goodsir Smith, all the other poets in the picture have had volumes of their poetry published by established British publishers in the past decade. The only edition of Garioch's poetry available currently is the *Complete Poetical Works*, a comprehensive if rather unwieldy collection published in 1983 and never available in paperback.<sup>4</sup>

Yet this is a poet admired for his sense of craftsmanship, for his humour and for his place in the poetic tradition of Scotland, a poet described in a recent book in these terms:

if one of the Renaissance makars were to be selected as having attained to the greatest degree (indeed, sadly, *any* degree) of popularity, as distinct from renown, among the general poetry-reading public, it would almost certainly be Robert Garioch.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Moffat. *Poets' Pub*. Oil on canvas, 1980. Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh.

<sup>2</sup> Marjorie Wilson. 'Auld Makar of Edinburgh', *Scots Magazine* vol. 115 no. 6 (September 1981), p. 585.

<sup>3</sup> James B. Caird. 'Robert Garioch: A Personal Appreciation', *SLJ* vol. 10 no. 2 (December 1983), p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Garioch, *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Robin Fulton. Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1983. All further references to this book are abbreviated to *CPW* and are embedded in the text.

<sup>5</sup> J. Derrick McClure. *Language, Poetry and Nationhood: Scots as a Poetic Language from 1878 to the*

So why has Garioch become so unfashionable? It has not helped that much of the criticism of Garioch's work has tended to say similar things: it has looked at a relatively narrow selection of his work, it has over-emphasised the kinship between Garioch and his Edinburgh predecessor Robert Fergusson, and there has occasionally been a nagging suggestion that Garioch's poetic ability was competent but limited. The breadth of Garioch's muse has often been ignored. But there are other more practical problems. In an age when instant gratification is the ideal, poems in Scots are unlikely to have the broad appeal they may once have enjoyed—and Garioch's best work is unquestionably his work in Scots. It is not *difficult* Scots, by and large, but for most readers it probably requires at least the use of a glossary. Garioch's stereotyped image as an old-fashioned writer has probably not helped either, yet some of his satirical poems about the corruption and incompetence of minor politicians are as relevant today as they ever were, and it will become obvious that Garioch's writing is often explicitly contemporary.

Though it does not attempt to explore these complicated issues in any great detail, this thesis seeks to present a balanced, wide ranging and unconventional reading of Garioch's writing as a whole. It makes significant use of Garioch's manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland, many of which throw new light on his writing. Some of them have been quoted by previous writers, but generally only those items which had been published already in *A Garioch Miscellany*, a useful volume prepared by the editor of the *Complete Poetical Works* which contains extracts from Garioch's writings—letters, reviews and articles—and some writing about Garioch.<sup>6</sup> The following five chapters deal with the poetry in a thematic, rather than a chronological, manner. The thesis argues for a wider view of his ability as a writer, and in so doing regards his writing in a light which is sometimes unconventional: it points out the similarities of his Edinburgh Sonnets to the *Glasgow Sonnets* of Edwin Morgan, for example, it deals with all his writing about Edinburgh together (something which, rather oddly, has not been attempted before), and it points out how Garioch could be probably the best known contemporary poet writing in Scots yet have very little to do with the Lallans movement which was supposedly responsible for the propagation of writing in Scots.

That is possibly merely a practical consequence of Garioch's shy, lonely nature, but is mirrored in his status as a poet today: slightly divorced from the mainstream, well regarded but not terribly well known. This thesis alone cannot change that perception, but it will succeed if at least it signposts the variety, skill and craftsmanship that are evident in Garioch's poetry, and emphasises the depth of his achievement as a writer.

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*Present*. East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000, p. 132.

<sup>6</sup> Robin Fulton (ed.). *A Garioch Miscellany*. Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1986. All references to this book are abbreviated to *GM* and embedded in the text.

## CHAPTER I

# Robert Garioch and Robert Fergusson: Under the Influence?

My ain toun's makar, monie an airt  
formed us in common, faur apairt  
in time, but fell alike in hert [*CPW*, p. 23]

Here, in the poem 'To Robert Fergusson', Robert Garioch reveals in the most explicit fashion his debt to a poet whom he appeared to regard as his spiritual predecessor. Fergusson is a presence so tangible that, in the opening lines of the poem, his long-dead image 'is mair clear/ nor monie things that nou appear'. The tragedy of Fergusson's short life and the magnitude of his achievement have tended to give him a romantic allure, and Garioch is in good company, since both Robert Burns and Robert Louis Stevenson empathised with Fergusson's experience, regarding him as an important influence. Stevenson even talked of how 'we are three Robins who have touched the Scots lyre this century'.<sup>1</sup> But the bond seems strongest between Garioch and Fergusson, two Edinburgh men centuries apart and utterly unlike each other. Aside from the biographical fact that Fergusson died as a young man on the brink of fame and Garioch lived, less well known than most of his literary contemporaries, into old age, there are more fundamental differences. Unlike Fergusson's stream of publication, Garioch's writing seemed to occur in fits and spurts and was never prolific; it seems to have been affected by the malaise of his unhappy existence as a schoolteacher. It may be slightly clichéd to suggest that Fergusson lived fast and died young, but those are the bare facts of his life; Garioch was a shy, reclusive and (financially) rather mean soul, happy to share his flat with a pigeon called Doody and to buzz around the New Town on a motor scooter picking up bargains.<sup>2</sup> The juxtaposition of these bald facts makes it inconceivable that the two should ever have been linked. Certainly there are occasional uncanny moments in Garioch's poetry where the presence of Fergusson is very strong. However, to portray Garioch as a latter-day Fergusson is simplistic and misleading in the extreme. Robert Garioch was certainly a writer who felt strong bonds with his poetic predecessors—Robert Fergusson, certainly, but also George Buchanan, William Dunbar and others—but did not allow this to hinder his originality.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to W. Craibe Angus, April 1891. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995, vol. 7, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> See James Caird. 'A Personal Appreciation', p. 73.

There has been a widespread and consistent perpetuation of the image of Garioch as neo-Fergusson, writing short humorous poems in Scots which demonstrate an acid tongue and a perceptive brain behind it; less comfortable when writing longer poems or writing in English. David Black is typical: he describes Robert Fergusson as 'that lesser eighteenth century figure with whom Garioch took such pleasure in comparing himself'.<sup>3</sup> Such a viewpoint does a great disservice to the breadth and interest of Garioch's writing. This chapter will demonstrate that a close connection, while understandable and justifiable up to a point, does neither writer any favours. Specifically, Garioch's influences were wider than is generally acknowledged. He was much more than a re-born Fergusson. What follows examines the similarities and the differences between the two writers' work and acknowledges the personal importance of the bond to Garioch. However, I shall argue that it is easy, and slightly misleading, to place too much emphasis on the connection. It is more profitable, and gives greater credit to the breadth of Garioch's poetry, to view him as an independent writer rather than, in his own phrase, 'a sort of vicariously rewarded Fergusson'. After all, Douglas Dunn argues that

It looks as if Garioch was not entirely aware of what he had achieved. What he did was reintroduce traditional, stanzaic poetry to the Scottish language, procedures of exactly the kind that MacDiarmid, for his own perfectly good reasons, had left well alone, but which Garioch, for his perfectly good reasons, needed in order to complete his poetic identity.<sup>4</sup>

Dunn's assessment suggests that we must be looking at a writer of no little individual talent and imagination, not simply a merchant of parody or of sickly tribute.

It should be reasonably obvious why these two poets are compared so readily. Both are identifiably poets of Edinburgh, seen to have produced their best work in the Scots dialect. Each has been overshadowed to some extent by contemporaries who were willing to write in English. And it is true to say that Garioch often exploited this undoubted kinship, in his poetry and in his other writings. Both have suffered from publishing neglect of some degree. However, it is equally true that Garioch often felt uneasy about the comparison being taken too far. In a letter to his close friend, the poet Sydney Tremayne, in 1974 Garioch hints at this flippantly, referring to 'this Fergusson industry, in which I have become an essential cog or even gaffer',<sup>5</sup> although in a letter written a month previously Garioch provides a perceptive reading of the dangers of becoming associated too intimately with Fergusson's reputation:

<sup>3</sup> David Black. 'In memoriam: Robert Garioch', *Chapman* 31 (1981), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Dunn. 'Cantraips and Trauchles—Robert Garioch and Scottish Poetry', *Cenrastus* 43 (Autumn 1992), p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Sydney Tremayne, 30 October 1974. National Library of Scotland, MS26673, fol. 54. Garioch's correspondence with Sydney Tremayne is by far the most voluminous, covers the greatest timespan and offers the greatest insight into Garioch's personality.

There is a tendency now hereabouts to think of my poems as somewhat akin to Robert Fergusson's, and indeed I have studied his poetry with a hope of learning from him, but I don't want to have too much of this sort of thing, even though I look like getting more money from events associated with the bicentenary of his death than he ever got in his day... Anyhow, there is a sort of pious tendency to make me a sort of vicariously rewarded Fergusson: this could easily make me foolish, apart from looking foolish.<sup>6</sup>

Garioch's involvement in the bicentenary included selecting the poems of Fergusson's in *Fergusson: A Bi-Centenary Handset*,<sup>7</sup> and taking part in a farcically chaotic conference for senior school pupils,<sup>8</sup> but that could hardly be regarded as overkill. However, it is tempting to conclude that, by making this kind of pronouncement, Garioch is guilty of trying to do two separate and incompatible things: to be regarded as Fergusson's successor, with all the potential praise by association, and to be regarded as his own man. Although it is never wholly wise to accept unquestioningly poets' assessment of their own work and influences, this was a private letter to a friend who, more than anyone else, recognised Garioch's abilities and knew the man and his poetry. Douglas Dunn has written of his suspicion at Garioch's viewpoint in this particular letter. He suggests that

Two decades after 'To Robert Fergusson', then, we find Garioch trying to give the slip to the critical temptation of overstating the extent to which he depended on Fergusson's example. Should we believe him? On the evidence, the answer must be 'Mibbe'...<sup>9</sup>

Dunn's use of that gloriously inexact Scots word 'mibbe'—which, depending on the speaker, can mean anything from 'perhaps' to 'definitely not'; he suggests 'only up to a point'—shows that there is still plenty of doubt which needs to be clarified. It is essential that, before any meaningful assessment of Garioch's ability as a poet can be made, the ghostly presence of Fergusson as Garioch's only influence needs to be exorcised once and for all.

The obvious starting point is Garioch's magnificent poem 'To Robert Fergusson', one of the few post-Burns poems in *Standard Habbie* which does not sound like mere pastiche (Garioch's achievement in sustaining this successfully for 46 verses should not be underestimated). The opening stanzas of the poem describe Fergusson's Edinburgh in terms which, by implication, depreciate the twentieth-century city. These were

...times when Embro was a quean  
sae weill worth seein  
that life wi her still had a wheen  
guid things worth preein. [*CPW*, p. 18]

<sup>6</sup> Letter to Sydney Tremayne, 24 September 1974. NLS, MS26673, fol. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Edinburgh: Reprographia, 1974.

<sup>8</sup> NLS, MS26673, fols. 54–8. The final plenary session descended into an atmosphere of such ill-feeling that Garioch walked out.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas Dunn, 'Cantraips and Trauchles', p. 40.

This difference is made more explicit later on:

But truth it is, our couthie city  
has cruddit in twa pairts a bittie  
and speaks twa tongues, ane coorse and grittie,  
    heard in the Cougait,  
the tither copied, mair's the pitie,  
    frae West of Newgate.

Whilk is the crudd and whilk the whey  
I wad be kinna sweirt to say,  
but this I ken, that of the twae  
    the corrupt twang  
of Cougait is the nearer tae  
    the leid ye sang. [CPW, p. 21]

Here Garioch underlines the *volte face* in attitudes to Scots writing that had taken place since Fergusson's death: while he and his contemporaries wrote in a language that seemed to be dying and felt the need to author significant quantities of verse in English, twentieth-century poets such as Garioch have been able to write largely in Scots. However, Garioch seems quite content to gloss over this one improvement and contrast it with the consequences of progress elsewhere, such as pollution—

Our fulyie's pusionit the Firth  
and caused, I dout, an unco dearth  
of thae Pandores of muckle girth  
    ye thocht sae fair [CPW, p. 21]

—and nuclear warfare:

Ye didnae hae to fash your thoombs  
wi hydrogen or atom boombs [CPW, p. 23]

But Garioch is concerned mainly with Fergusson's city, a place brimming with life and characters, people who—invoking the titles of some of Fergusson's Scots poems—'kick owre the traces/ in the Daft Days or at Leith Races' [CPW, p. 19]. Later the poem becomes more personal, as Garioch mentions first that both he and Fergusson were educated at the (Royal) High School; he then imagines a dream-like vision in which the two poets tour the streets of Edinburgh:

But aye we'd rise wi little hairm  
and cleik ilk ither by the airm,  
singan in unison to chairm  
    awa the skaith,  
syne seek some cantraip, harum-skarum  
    and naething laith. [CPW, p. 24]

Garioch realises that his dream vision is exactly that; moreover, in his Edinburgh it is something that would elicit disapproval from 'the nippie-tongue of morn' which 'pits aa sic glaumerie to scorn'. The image of the poet spending time with Fergusson is an in-

teresting one, because one of Fergusson's contemporaries uses much the same technique in his poem 'To Robert Fergusson'. Like Garioch, this writer pays tribute to Fergusson by mentioning his poetry, and imagines that

When I again *Auld Reikie* see,  
And can forgether, lad, with thee,  
Then we wi' muckle mirth and glee  
Shall tak a gill,  
And of your *caller oysters* we  
Shall eat our fill...<sup>10</sup>

The writer (identified only as J.S.) has not produced a poem worth lingering over, but the interest lies in Fergusson's reply, which seems to swither between modest refusal of J.S.'s compliments and uneasy insults.

Awa', ye wylie fleetchin *fallow*;  
The rose shall grow like gowan yallow,  
Before I turn sae toom and shallow,  
And void of fusion,  
As a' your butter'd words to swallow  
In vain delusion. [p. 71]

Fergusson goes on to claim that 'Ye mak my Muse a dautit pett', but by the end of the poem he seems quite keen to have a drink with him, and in the final stanza hopes that 'Lang may ye thrive,/ Weel happit in a cozy hive'.

Fergusson's reply to a poem of the same title by Andrew Gray is similarly awkward, and betrays irritation as much as modesty:

Can you nae ither theme divine  
To blaw upon, but *my* engyne? <sup>11</sup>

Obviously there is little to be gained from speculating over what Fergusson's reply might have been to Garioch's poem—one hopes rather more positive, although it seems odd that there should be an echo here of these two less than illustrious predecessors. The poem makes clear Garioch's admiration not simply for Fergusson but for Fergusson's era and the city he knew. In fact, though Garioch's respect for Fergusson is clear, it is the attractions of Fergusson's Edinburgh (or, at least, a very romanticised vision of it) which are the main theme of the poem, which concludes with Garioch wandering off to 'some suburb new and bare'.

The other poem of Garioch's which is directly about Fergusson is the sonnet 'At Robert Fergusson's Grave', which describes a ceremony at the poet's graveside. The poem is one of the Edinburgh Sonnets, about two dozen in number, most of which are

<sup>10</sup> *The Poems of Robert Fergusson*, ed. Matthew P. MacDiarmid, 2 vols. Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1954 and 1956, vol. II, p. 69.

<sup>11</sup> *The Poems of Robert Fergusson*, ed. Matthew MacDiarmid, vol. II, p. 151.



very sarcastic and amusing. But this is completely the opposite; it is subdued and respectful: an attribute notably absent from all the other sonnets, which revel in rebellion. It describes what is, by all accounts, a sombre affair:

Canongait kirkyaird in the failing year  
is auld and grey, the wee roseirs are bare,  
five gulls learn white agin the dirty air:  
why are they here? There's naething for them here. [CPW, p. 86]

The poem concentrates on the tragedy of Fergusson and has rather a gloomy air. Only in the final words are we told why Fergusson is so important, why all these people are standing in the gloom looking at a headstone:

...Lichtlie this gin ye daur:  
here Robert Burns knelt and kissed the mool. [CPW, p. 86]

Although the meaning of the poem only really becomes clear in the final couple of lines, the whole piece is effectively an allegory of Fergusson's place in the Scottish literary tradition: the faithful few supporters turn out in an inhospitable atmosphere to show their support and continuing appreciation. There is no doubt that Garioch was one of Fergusson's most passionate supporters and a great admirer of his poetry, but that does not necessarily mean that his own poetry is influenced by Fergusson to a similar level. In both these poems, Garioch makes plain his respect for Fergusson. However, neither poem can really be simplified to the extent that they prove Fergusson to be a major influence. In any case, as Sydney Tremayne recognised in an unpublished letter, there are plenty of other candidates who have tended to be ignored:

It's Hugh Mac-You-Know-Who's mantle you will inherit, not Fergusson's. Don't you realise that you are the only Scots language poet there is and Scottish literature would die without you... Incidentally, you are a far better poet than Fergusson. From what I've seen of him he was crude and you never are, and he didn't have your sense of timing. But it's typical of Scotland: everything has to be secondhand somehow.<sup>12</sup>

Tremayne's assertion that Garioch will inherit the mantle of MacDiarmid seems rather a strange one; Garioch's own opinion of MacDiarmid is now unhelpfully smothered in innuendo, but Tremayne's letters make clear that Garioch's friend had little time for Grieve. That is not to suggest that Tremayne's comment is intended as an insult—far from it—but it underlines the fact that to cite Fergusson as Garioch's principal precursor is to forget the possibility of other influences existing and to ignore the distinctly cosmopolitan nature of Garioch's writing. To judge from the fact that one wall of Garioch's study 'was dominated by a large portrait of George Buchanan',<sup>13</sup> the sixteenth century Scottish Humanist would appear to have been an equally important figure. Garioch produced translations into Scots of two of Buchanan's plays, *Jephthes*

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Sydney Tremayne, 28 September 1974. NLS MS26569, fols 40–41.

<sup>13</sup> James Caird. 'A Personal Appreciation', p. 72.

and *Baptistes*, of which he was immensely proud.<sup>14</sup> He had a great deal of affection for this, his favourite work, and put a great deal of energy into his struggle to have it published;<sup>15</sup> his affection for Buchanan is so clear that Buchanan as much as Fergusson might seem Garioch's poetic ancestor. Chapter IV deals with these plays in more detail, but there are two major poems concerning Buchanan. One of these, 'The Humanist's Trauchles in Paris', is a translation into Scots of Buchanan's 'Quam misera sit conditio docentium literas humaniores Lutetiae', and 'Garioch's Repone til George Buchanan' is Garioch's reply to this poem. Buchanan's original poem describes his lot as a teacher in Paris, which was not a happy one, as his biographer, I.D. McFarlane, makes clear:

The seamy side of boarding life, the loudmouthed janitor, the raw recruits to learning, the excessive use of the cane, all this seems to have jarred badly; but the curriculum had its antiquated aspects too.<sup>16</sup>

This sense of incompatibility is evident in the unpublished introduction to the poem, cited by Robin Fulton, which suggests that Paris is a place

whaur men o pairts were nocht respeckit,  
but ilka day begowkt and geckit  
by dozent, impiddent or glaikit  
colleginaris [CPW, p. 296]

It seems from the poem itself that 'men o pairts' were respected least of all by their scholars. Garioch's choice of language paints a particularly bleak picture of Buchanan's existence: while the dominie 'taks a text/apairt, examines and dissects/its moniplies', his Neanderthal charges

...snore like grumphies  
or wauken wi the thochts of tumphies  
or nane ava, puir donnart sumphies,  
as wyce as cuddies. [CPW, p. 31]

This is a poem entirely devoid of optimism. Later we hear that

In short, if poetry's your lot,  
there's unco little to be got  
frae scrievin or frae teachin o't  
for bread and butter [CPW, p. 33]

The poem concludes with the plea

<sup>14</sup> Robert Garioch. *George Buchanan's Jephthah and The Baptist translatit in Scots*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959.

<sup>15</sup> Among those who rejected it was T.S. Eliot at Faber and Faber, who was nevertheless impressed: 'I have examined your most ingenious translation of Buchanan's *The Baptist*, though it is by no means easy reading for a Southerner [this word is crossed out and the word 'Southron' appended] like myself... but I am afraid that most London publishers would regard it as a considerable risk...'. Letter from T.S. Eliot, 13 November 1957. NLS, MS26561, fol. 131.

<sup>16</sup> I.D. McFarlane. *Buchanan*. London: Duckworth, 1981.

Fusionless muses, haud awa!  
 Seek out some ither Johnnie-raw  
 to sair ye. As for me, I'll caa  
 anither jig. [*CPW*, p. 34]

The reason for Garioch's insistently depressing tone becomes clear in the 'Repone', where he points out that 'I've felt the same mysel'. In a manner not dissimilar to his technique in 'To Robert Fergusson', Garioch points out the similarities between their situations and shows that he sympathises with the older poet. He does this initially by mentioning Buchanan's indirect rôle in Garioch's university education:

I've scrievit monie a sang and sonnet  
 sin owre my heid they waved thon bonnet  
     made out of your auld breeks,  
 and see me nou, a makar beld  
 wi bleerit een and feet unstell'd,  
     no worth a cog of leeks. [*CPW*, p. 35]

As Mario Relich points out, Garioch's use of the phrase 'auld breeks' brings to mind the poem of Fergusson, 'To my Auld Breeks', which also deals with poverty, and suggests that 'Garioch, in short, implies that he is modernising Buchanan by way of Fergusson'.<sup>17</sup> Here, however, Fergusson is a tangent: the poem is about Garioch and Buchanan. All the way through the poem is a feeling of the helplessness of the teacher's situation, expressed with weary humour:

A kep and gown—what dae they maitter?  
 a kep and bells wad suit him better. [*CPW*, p. 36]

However, the final line shows anything but humour, and is a resigned plea to anyone considering following in the footsteps of Garioch and Buchanan:

MORAL  
 Lat onie young poetic chiel  
 that reads thae lines tak tent richt weill:  
     THINK TWICE, OR IT'S OWRE LATE! [*CPW*, p. 37]

It is easy to understand why Garioch felt this way. He retired from schoolteaching at the earliest opportunity, despite the financial consequences, and his letters make clear not only that teaching was a struggle but that the stress he encountered affected his writing as well:

But it is an awful strain, this Deacon Brodie sort of life, Sutherland by day and Garioch by night, schoolmastering and making poetry being such different things, and yet both tiring you out in the same way, that's the damn thing about it. So for the last fortnight I've had a kind of revulsion or scunner and can't bear to read or write or do anything serious in the evenings. Usually I'm half-gyte

<sup>17</sup> Mario Relich. 'Scottish Tradition and Robert Garioch's Individual Talent', *Lines Review* 136 (March 1996), p. 10.

with the thought of so much to do and only the evenings to do it in, so that the day seems an irrelevant and maddening interruption... What a life.<sup>18</sup>

Alexander Scott underlines this, and suggests that

there is nothing more savage, in the whole of contemporary Scots verse, than the 'Repone's' picture of the awful fate of the Edinburgh arts graduate condemned to a life sentence of school-teaching, without the option. At the end of his appalling illustration of treadmill tomfoolery, Garioch rubs in the moral... not only once but—adding insult to injury—twice times over, as if forced by habit to employ the methods of the schoolmaster even when he functions as a poet.<sup>19</sup>

While it is undeniable that these poems are riven with bleak personal experience, it is notable that Garioch finds it necessary once again to emphasise his similarities to his predecessors, when the poem would work just as well without such an approach. It is almost as if he is too modest—or uncertain—to allow his work to stand up and be regarded on its own, and he feels the need to justify himself by pointing out his similarity to the great figures who came before, hindering any attempt to view Garioch in his own right.

Elsewhere in the poetry there are other influences. One of Garioch's English poems, 'Chalk Farm, 1945', has the spectre of Auden hanging over it, not just in its explicit reference to his work ('Several bloody years have passed/ since Auden wrote *The Orators*'). There are echoes of 'Night Mail', not only in the subject matter (it is set at the railway station in Chalk Farm) but in its competent grasp of rhythm. The rhyme scheme is an unusual one, two-line sentences, the last word of each rhyming with the last word of the first line of the next, arranged as rhyming couplets:

Several men with newspapers  
descend the steps at eight-fifteen.  
Beside the empty slot-machine,  
They group themselves without alarm.  
This is the platform of Chalk Farm,  
black, grey and white, a photograph. [CPW, p. 71]

This is an unusual but effective pattern, and the unconventional layout mirrors what the poem says about the war—despite all the upheaval,

we daily workers go our way.  
This happens every working-day  
and every week it is the same.  
Several years of blast and flame  
have not changed these passengers. [CPW, p. 72]

<sup>18</sup> Letter to J.K. Annand, 1 October 1955. [GM, p. 32]

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Scott. 'Robert Garioch: The Makar and the Mask', *Scottish Review Arts and Environment* 23 (August 1981), p. 14.

Part of the interest of this poem is that it gives a suggestion of the possible direction of Garioch's poetry had he continued to write only in English—influenced to some extent by contemporary writers but showing original thought. We could contrast this with Fergusson's English-language poetry, most of which tends to be formulaic and unoriginal. However, there comes a point where comparing Garioch's poetry to that of other writers becomes pointlessly misleading, since it suggests some form of poetical magpie with no capability for original thought. Instead of just looking for similarities between work by Garioch and by earlier poets, we should be at least as alert to differences. Robin Fulton attempts to relate the Garioch's poem 'Embro to the Ploy' back to Fergusson by suggesting that it has 'several notable ancestors—e.g. Fergusson's "Leith Races".' [*CPW*, p. 293] There are indeed many convenient similarities between the two poems, but these are not striking enough to suggest that Fergusson's poem is simply a progenitor of Garioch's. For example, the rhyme schemes are *almost* identical (ababdcde in 'Leith Races'; ababdcdef in 'Embro to the Ploy'), but part of the distinctive appeal of Garioch's poem is his use of the bob and wheel at the end of each verse to emphasise a cutting aside before finishing with a comparatively innocent-sounding refrain, for example in the seventh verse—

*Cumba na Cloinne* played on strings  
torments a piper quicker  
to get his dander up, by jings,  
than thirty u.p. liquor,  
hooch aye!  
in Embro to the ploy. [*CPW*, p. 15]

—or in the eighth:

Our Queen and Princess, buskit braw,  
enjoyed the hale affair  
(see press)  
in Embro to the play. [*CPW*, p. 16]

There are also obvious differences in the way the poets treat their subject matter—Fergusson starts his poem with an attempt at a neo-Classical conceit that he is being shown the sights by a ‘braw buskit laughing lass’ who is Mirth, but she evaporates almost as soon as she is described; Garioch uses no such method. As well as this, the Leith Races in Fergusson’s poem are a peripheral background to the poet’s description of typical Edinburgh characters, including his favourite target, the City Guard (Sir Walter Scott commented that Fergusson ‘mentions them so often that he may be termed their poet laureate’<sup>20</sup>). By contrast, the ‘Ploy’—i.e. the Edinburgh Festival—is the subject of Garioch’s satire, and although he satirises other specific things—journalists, wealthy Americans, ‘furthgangan Embro folk’—they are all part of main target.

<sup>20</sup> Cited by David Daiches in *Robert Fergusson*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982, p. 5.

In short, although this comparison with a poem of Fergusson's seems convenient it is also a little pointless: there are similarities, but the differences reveal Garioch's special signature.

Indeed, if one is to insist on finding a poem which is an obvious predecessor of 'Embryo to the Ploy', then one should look beyond Fergusson to the anonymous mediæval poem, 'Peblis to the Play'. Comparing opening verses, we can see the astonishing similarity of form and structure between the two:

At Beltane,<sup>21</sup> when ilk body bownis  
To Peblis to the play,  
To hear the singin' and the soundis,  
The solace, sooth to say;  
Be firth and forest furth they found;  
They graithit them full gay;  
God wait that wald they do, that stound,  
For it was their feast day,  
They said,  
Of Peblis to the play<sup>22</sup>

In simmer, when aa sorts foregether  
in Embro to the ploy,  
fowk seek out friens to hae a blether,  
or faes they'd fain annoy;  
smorit wi British Railways' reek  
frae Glesca or Glen Roy  
or Wick, they come to hae a week  
of cultivatit joy,  
or three,  
in Embro to the ploy.

This shows clearly that 'Embryo to the Ploy' is not simply an update of one of Fergusson's poems; rather, it shows Garioch's awareness of the 'Christis Kirk' tradition which is represented not only by Fergusson but by Dunbar, Lindsay, Drummond of Hawthornden, Ramsay and Burns among others. The way in which 'Embryo to the Ploy' feeds into this tradition has been mentioned briefly by Allan H. MacLaine<sup>23</sup> but generally ignored elsewhere. That is unfortunate, since Garioch's poem is a splendid example of the genre, with a keen sense of its traditions. Some of these are summarised by MacLaine in the introduction to his anthology:

Generally speaking, the basic pattern of this type of poem... is as follows: there is a satiric description of working-class folk (usually peasants or town tradesmen) shown on some festive occasion such as a wedding or a fair. The people are engaged in all kinds of revelry, wooing, drunkenness, horse-play, ribaldry, brawling, and bungling. This descriptive method gives a panoramic impression of the whole crowded and colourful scene by highlighting carefully chosen details. (MacLaine. *The Christis Kirk Tradition*, p. v.)

In effect, 'Embryo to the Ploy' is a sophisticated literary joke, taking a recognised traditional form (and, specifically, its earliest known poem) and turning the convention on its head—for the subject of the satire is not 'working-class folk' but the elite. This satirical method is a favourite of Garioch's, as will become evident later in this thesis,

<sup>21</sup> Beltane is '1 or 3 May; an old Scottish quarter day... a pagan fire festival on these days' [CSD]

<sup>22</sup> *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Verse*, ed. Hugh MacDiarmid. London: Macmillan, 1940; repr. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1993, p. 271.

<sup>23</sup> Allan H. MacLaine (ed.). *The Christis Kirk Tradition: Scots Poems of Folk Festivity*. Glasgow: ASLS, 1996, p. vi.

but here it underlines the originality of the poem and shows that attempts to map it onto the work of Fergusson are rather crude.

In fact, 'Embroid to the Ploy' is a *tour de force* which shows Garioch at his best: rhythmic dexterity which belies the secondhand structure, apposite choice of Scots vocabulary, deadly accurate satire and a consciously contemporary voice. We hear how

Americans wi routh of dollars,  
wha drink our whisky neat,  
wi Sasunachs and Oxford Scholars  
are eydent for the treat  
of music sedulously high-tie  
at thirty-bob a seat;  
Wop opera performed in Eytie  
to them's richt up their street,  
they say,  
In Embroid to the ploy. [CPW, p. 14]

But the attraction of the poem lies not so much in this kind of general carping but in the more specific engagement with the reality of the Festival. The tenth verse tells how

A happening, incident, or splore  
affrontit them that saw  
a thing they'd never seen afore—  
in the McEwan Haa:  
a lassie in a wheelie-chair  
wi naething on at aa,  
jist my luck! I wasna there,  
it's no the thing ava,  
tut-tut,  
in Embroid to the ploy. [CPW, p. 16]

This verse seems to combine an acid observation of the typical Edinburgh reaction to any slightly shocking Festival production with a small dose of eccentric fantasy; however, this newspaper report shows that the incident did occur and is actually reported without exaggeration:

In the midst of the International Drama Conference of 1963 a naked model on a trolley was pushed across the organ gallery of the McEwan Hall. This was one of a number of 'happenings' organised by the American director Kenneth Dewey. A publicity storm erupted. The conference organiser, John Calder, and the model, Anna Kesselaar, were charged with indecency (Kesselaar was acquitted). It remains a landmark in post-modern performance.<sup>24</sup>

For all its qualities, there are a couple of peripheral issues attached to this poem which reveal Garioch's slightly odd approach to his own work. It should be obvious from both the basis and the content of this poem that it is a significant work into which a great deal of thought has gone; it is also one which was revised and added to on

<sup>24</sup> Andy Lavender. 'It's weird, it's wonderful—it must be Edinburgh'. *The Times*, 2 August 1999, p. 44.

several occasions.<sup>25</sup> And it seems to be perfect for poetry readings. Yet it appears that Garioch neglected the poem almost entirely when reading in public. The National Library of Scotland possesses the notes Garioch made for his poetry readings between 1964 and 1981.<sup>26</sup> These show that, while certain poems were repeated over and over again, he used 'Embroid to the Ploy' on only six occasions, and even here he did not always read the complete poem. Several other aspects of Garioch's behaviour at poetry readings seem to have been rather odd. He writes to Sydney Tremayne that 'I like to have everything ready to look up, and I cannot stand a tenth-rate poet affecting contemptuous ease and hunting about a bundle of waste paper, and saying "I'll read this one—no, on second thoughts I won't!"'.<sup>27</sup> Yet Edwin Morgan (who shared the bill with Garioch regularly at poetry readings, as well as working closely with him on the editorial board of *Scottish International Review*) recalls Garioch's performing style thus:

He enjoyed playing the role of the performer, even of the clown, the naïve unworldly bumbling man who can't find the right book or the right poem—though in fact he usually had a careful, numbered list of poems he was going to read!<sup>28</sup>

Garioch's characteristically dishevelled appearance would hardly have helped in this respect, but for someone who seemed to have been so concerned about giving the right impression it seems downright stupid that he should have gone through a long phase of beginning readings with his poem 'No Fool like an Old Fool', as the same document makes plain.

<sup>25</sup> There exist at least three additional verses to this poem. As well as the verse quoted by Robin Fulton [*CPW*, p. 293], NLS, MS26595 contains, at fol. 6r:

They say that, in the George Hotel  
(George Street, first on the richt)  
the maist-respeckit clientèle  
hae haggis ilka nicht.  
Whatever gaes intill't... aha!

it grees wi them aa richt,  
for when the piper gies a blaw  
they dance wi aa their micht,  
hoots toots  
[in Embroid to the ploy—this last line is missing]

Meanwhile, another exists in a letter to Sydney Tremayne of 3 August 1967:

I truly hope we'll try and please  
our guid Lord Provost Brechin,  
and burn yon film of 'Ulysses'  
(I've read the book, a dreich ane)  
wi miles of bleizan celluloid,

a hunder pipers screichan,  
and effigies of Dr Freud,  
and fountains of free skeechan  
(jist a copy)  
at Embroid to the ploy.

Garioch goes on to explain: 'You may not have heard the exciting news that our City Fathers... have decided not to allow the showing of the film of *Ulysses*. (I nearly went to see it in London, but the seats were aafie dear.) Anyhow, Lord Provost Brechin... said in a speech that this film should be burnt in public...' [*GM*, p. 41]

<sup>26</sup> NLS, MS26616.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to Sydney Tremayne, 23 January 1974. *GM*, p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> From EM's notes to the Scotsoun cassette *In Mind o a Makar, Robert Garioch 1909-1981*. [*GM*, p. 25]



The genesis of 'Embroid to the Ploy' makes it clear that Garioch's influences were considerably more wide-ranging than the connection to Fergusson implies, and his empathy with the makars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is stronger than might be obvious. In an early article entitled 'The Makars' the apprentice poet identifies himself with the difficulties which they faced:

As a journeyman makar, I wonder how the makars set about their job. Each had a huge vocabulary; where did they mine the golden words to form their aureate diction: Did they compose by dint of hard work, putting together a jigsaw puzzle without a reference pattern, composed of pieces few of which would fit? Had they lists of words and especially of rhymes?<sup>29</sup>

Evidently, at this stage of his career, Garioch was giving a great deal of thought to the way these writers worked—he produced his own list of rhyming words<sup>30</sup>—and was in awe of their abilities.

Even in some of the later, longer poems, such as 'The Big Music', 'The Bog', 'The Wire' and 'The Muir', where Garioch is at his most successful and original, there are occasional echoes of this fascination. These poems are particularly interesting, partly because it is not their rhythmical structure which marks them out; rather it is the ambitious nature of their engagement with primarily twentieth-century issues: warfare, in the case of 'The Bog' and 'The Wire', atomic theory in the case of 'The Muir' ('The Big Music' deals with piping, a more traditional topic, but maybe not for a lowland writer—it has in any case an explicitly twentieth-century setting). These topics are apart from the mainstream anyway, but Garioch is brave for attempting to deal with them in quite broad Scots without making it feel hackneyed or deliberately synthetic.

What separates these poems from most of Garioch's lyrical verse is that they are painted on a larger canvas; they have more sense of occasion. 'The Big Music' may be half as long as 'To Robert Fergusson' in terms of lines, but it seems more of a piece; it has added direct impact. This is partly because it, like 'The Muir', is not divided into verses, and is therefore free from the episodic feel that is inevitable with a verse form such as Standard Habbie. It is also explicitly contemporary, which suggests an attempt by Garioch to justify the continued existence of the seemingly anachronistic tradition of *piobaireachd*; this sense is heightened by his setting of the poem in what is obviously contemporary London:<sup>31</sup>

Victoria Street in London, the place gaes wi the name,  
a Hanoverian drill-haa, near Buckingham Palace,

<sup>29</sup> NLS, MS26581, fol. 80. In the ms the words 'a reference pattern' are unclear; this is my reading.

<sup>30</sup> NLS, MS26583.

<sup>31</sup> Robin Fulton mentions that 'When printed in *The Big Music* this poem carried an epigraph: "And, ten to wan, the piper is a cockney," from MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*.' [CPW, p. 297]

near the cross-Channel trains, Edinburgh coaches,  
 Army and Navy Stores, an ex-Abbey, a cathedral,  
 near the Crazy Gang, the 'Windsor,' Artillery Mansions,  
 no faur, owre the water, frae the Lambeth Walk,  
 near the exotic kirk-spire carved wi the Stars and Stripes,  
 disappointed nou, a frustum, whangit wi a boomb. [CPW, p. 42]

The description is deliberately claustrophobic, juxtaposing a relentless list of slightly dubious attractions—a drill-hall, the Army and Navy stores, a bomb-damaged church—with cross-Channel trains and Edinburgh coaches, two forms of escape that retain a certain faded glamour. The following lines conclude the purpose of this effect: 'This great Victorian drill-haa is naethin like Scotland,/ binna the unco hicht and vastness of the place.' Garioch's dry humour is already obvious in this endearingly unlikely simile.

The hall is the unlikely venue for a piping competition, and the rest of the poem is an astonishingly lyrical description of the contestants' playing, which captures both the haunting beauty and the awkwardness of the bagpipes; the impact of this description is heightened by its location immediately after a line break, the only one in the poem.

Nou, jaggit as levin, a flash of notes frae the chanter  
 slaps throu the unisoun, and tines itsel in the drones,  
 no jist richtlie in tune, the snell snarl dirls wi a beat,  
 sae the piper eases the jynts of the drones, and tries again,  
 and again, and again, he fettles the quirks of his fykie engine... [CPW, p. 42]

It is difficult to do justice to the skill of Garioch's writing, and especially the way he handles the build-up of tension, without simply quoting the entire poem. We are left in no doubt that *piobaireachd* is a musical skill like no other as the description unfolds at a stately pace that is imbued with the feelings of the player, always graceful but with a tension that the whole thing might collapse at any moment:

Yet piper or pipes may fail, whan the piper wad be at his best,  
 ane of his reeds no jist richt, ae finger no swipper or souple,  
 the strang rule of the will may falter, and tine the rhythm... [CPW, p. 43]

The reader feels the tension mount as the player ascends right to the top of the range of his instrument, and this is surely the emotional climax of the poem:

The piper hauds on, wi the siccarness of doom,  
 fowre centuries of culture ruggan at his hairt  
 like the michtie pressure tearing throu his reeds... [CPW, p. 44]

The implication seems to be that *piobaireachd* is unique because it symbolises the angst and struggle present in Scottish history, especially in the history of the Highlands, in a way that no other artform can manage; it 'adorns tragedy wi maist sensie jewels' [CPW, p. 44]. The playing is often described in terms redolent of Scotland—the grace notes are like a 'thrawn, strang Clydesdale' [CPW, p. 44].

Yet for all the description of beauty, there is still room for deprecatory humour—'Doctor Johnson likit the pipes, we're ay tellt, because he was deif' [*CPW*, p. 43]. And the touch which leaves Garioch's unmistakable fingerprint on the whole poem is its ending. The penultimate line—'He taks leave of us wi dignity, turns, and is gane' [*CPW*, p. 44]—would seem to be a perfect way of finishing, absolutely in tune with the stately grandeur of the slow build-up of the rest of the poem. But it is followed by a comment which, though it seems to puncture the mood entirely, takes us back to the circumstances of the start of the poem, and which also shows Garioch's gift for needling the foibles of the Scottish mind: 'The judges rate him heich, but no in the first three' [*CPW*, p. 44]. We are brought down to earth with a bump, and are reminded that this is not a remote Scottish moorland, it is a drill hall in the middle of London, and the seemingly throwaway comment is only as out of place as the piper is in his current surroundings. It is not only the pawky humour that marks out the poem as typical. David Black suggests that in this poem 'one feels the respect of one skilled craftsman for another, and always at such moments the verse takes on a tone of calm stable authority'.<sup>32</sup> This authority bolsters the originality of the poem, and is one of the hallmarks of Garioch's writing, described by Edwin Morgan when Garioch submitted it to *Scottish International* as 'serious, ruminative, leisurely-abstract yet descriptive of experience'.<sup>33</sup>

I wish to conclude this chapter with some remarks on Garioch's most ambitious poem, 'The Muir', which brings us back neatly to the question of Fergusson. It is an astonishing piece, which attempts to present atomic theory not only in an accessible manner, but in Scots. Such an enterprise might sound unwise, but the poem is a masterly discussion of Heaven and Hell, reality and existence. The poem opens with a discussion of Dante's Hell, which in this case sounds suspiciously like Morningside:

Monie a time in Hell was Dante faced  
wi glowres frae weill-kent neibors, nou disgraced,  
aa ettlan for a crack, even amang  
the busie dool of Hell, tho aye in haste... [*CPW*, p. 54]

After introducing his vision of Heaven—'Badenoch in simmer, wi nae clegs about'—Garioch begins his exposition of atomic theory.

What maks the solid substance of this muir  
I walk on, that wad seem to be a dour  
vault for the cryptic damned, a flair for us  
meantime? Electrons in ellipse attour

<sup>32</sup> David Black. 'In Memoriam', p. 3. However, Garioch does suggest that at the piping competition which inspired the poem he 'could not tell at what point the tuning-up gave place to the tune'. Letter to 'a Friend', 22 September 1971. [*GM*, p. 48]

<sup>33</sup> From a comment on submissions, 17 November 1969. University of St Andrews, MS37534.

the atomy's wee massive nucleus,  
 balanced in void atween their impetus  
 to flee awa frae central government  
 and minus chairge that ettles for the plus. [CPW, p. 57]

The beauty of the use of Scots in this context is that, aside from the humour of descriptions such as 'the atomy's wee massive nucleus', it removes any formal or explicitly scientific vocabulary that would put off the general reader. This effect is heightened by Garioch's willingness to compare the important parts of his description to recognisable things: the sun's rays are scattered like 'the tracer-bullets splairgin frae a gun'; he asks if people 'sit/ and watch the atom dance an echtsom reel/ in whilk the figures never seem to fit'.

This is not to suggest that the poem is simple or straightforward. The tolling chorus of 'And Fergusson gyte, gyte in Darien', which appears twice following Garioch's initial discussion of the nature of matter, seems at first glance to be an unnecessary and irrelevant intrusion, which smacks of an obsession with the eighteenth-century poet. However, it gradually becomes clear that the image of Fergusson, alone in Edinburgh's madhouse,<sup>34</sup> is an opportunity for Garioch to discuss the nature of reality. He returns constantly to the nature of Fergusson's madness, asking

How can we say that Fergusson was wud  
 to skar at an eternity of Hell,  
 whan our conception of the Yird itsel  
 is like a tree kept growan wi nae root,  
 nae less absurd nor fire that winna quell  
 even in a vacuum of time? [CPW, p. 60]

Later, he casts doubts upon whether Fergusson's melancholia was itself reason enough for him to be regarded as mad: he cannot see

that folk are gyte, semply becaise they gie  
 the trauchle up of fechtin wi this thing  
 and faa at last intill melancholy [CPW, p. 61]

Fergusson here is a useful and effective image, but one that is slightly peripheral to the real meaning of the poem, which is emphatically not 'about Fergusson'. Rather, the poem represents a reassuring continuity—Robin Fulton suggests that 'the one constant is our inescapable human dimensions, the only scale which gives any meaning to ideas of hell'<sup>35</sup>—and a scepticism about the nature of scientific knowledge:

The best of scientists, for aa their skill,  
 hae never seen an atom, never will,

<sup>34</sup> which was located, as Garioch's note to the poem points out, in the former headquarters of the Darien Company. [CPW, p. 298]

<sup>35</sup> Robin Fulton. *Contemporary Scottish Poetry: Individuals and Contexts*. Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1974, p. 172.

for aa their instruments of utmaist pouer;  
 the benmaist evidence wi whilk they deal  
 is no the atom, but the atom's spoor,  
 readings or cathode-blips. [*CPW*, p. 63]

The tone is questioning without being narrow-minded, and it is a neat portent of the conclusion to the poem, which blames 'the dour/ pedal-note, in fremmit key' of an unpreached faith, a 'soun [that] is man-made' for obscuring our view of the big picture, and concludes by suggesting, in a rare moment of Christian comment, that 'Jehovah by the hairt maun aye be socht' [*CPW*, pp. 66-7].

With no slight intended, Garioch has reached a philosophical level never attained by Fergusson, and worthy of an even older makar, Dunbar, whose presence is equally tangible here, not just in the obvious reference to 'the samyn sup Kinde Kittock wycelie walit/ thou time that, quod Dunbar, God leuk't and lauch't...' [*CPW*, p. 56], but in the elevated nature of the subject matter and the grandness of the language—

God's ire maun gorroch and amidthwart thraw  
 intill the sempiternal buller, down. [*CPW*, p. 54]

God the Force supern  
 may kyth Himsel til us in an equation  
 in finite terms... [*CPW*, pp. 56-7]

It is fitting that it is Garioch himself who is able to underline the quality of his verse craftsmanship, equal to that of his distinguished predecessor. This poem underlines the fact that Garioch could be a champion of Fergusson while finding his own voice: the poems about Fergusson show that the influence is strong, but his other work shows that he found other things important too. Some of what is by common consent Garioch's best work—'The Wire', 'The Muir', the Belli sonnets, the Buchanan translations—has little or nothing to do with Fergusson, and instead shows off the distinctiveness of Garioch's voice, one that could draw on a variety of other voices while developing its own distinctiveness. It is with that distinctiveness that we need to engage if Garioch is to be regarded with the respect he deserves.

## CHAPTER II

### 'A Queerlike Town': Garioch and Edinburgh

'I love Edinburgh'<sup>1</sup>

The one fact that links Garioch and Fergusson indisputably is that they are both poets of that city. It is absolutely central to each writer's vision, and each writes in a way that makes it impossible to imagine that he could have lived anywhere else, or that any other city could have provided inspiration. Yet Garioch spent many years living at Bromley in Kent, where he published his first two collections on a hand press in his front room. Garioch's letters hint at reasons for his exile but never explain anything—in a letter to J.K. Annand a couple of years before he returned to Edinburgh he says that 'for a complication of reasons I couldn't bear to come back to Edinburgh, so I got a job in London on coming out of the army and here I am'<sup>2</sup>—but Sydney Tremayne recalls that, once he had returned, 'Robert could seldom be persuaded away from Edinburgh for long. There he found his material and was at home, but his poems are universal, not merely local'.<sup>3</sup> In short, it would be deeply misleading to suggest that his feelings about the place were straightforward. Tempting though it would be to romanticise his return to Edinburgh after years teaching in London, James Caird (a close friend) claims that

Garioch was a great deal happier in his London school, Upton House, than when he taught in Scotland. In a letter to me in 1977 he wrote: 'what a good school that was. I was not always unlucky'. Writing to Sydney Tremayne in 1973 he had said: 'London was a place in which I was decently treated and found myself among a staff of adults. I will not have a bad word said against London, especially the East End'.<sup>4</sup>

The pages that follow will ignore the biographical reasons for his exile, but will seek to quantify Garioch's relationship with Edinburgh, as it appears from his writing, as well as comparing his Edinburgh Sonnets with the *Glasgow Sonnets* of Edwin Morgan.

While it is certainly true that the humorous-critical poet of 'Embryo to the Ploy' displays one aspect of Garioch's opinion of Edinburgh, it will become obvious that his feelings run deeper than that. This chapter will seek to argue that Garioch's career was punctuated by major projects relating to Edinburgh: his columns about Edinburgh life in the *Scots Observer* during the 1930s; *The Masque of Edinburgh*, which appeared first in the *Scots Observer* at the same time and was later published separately, much expanded; the Edinburgh Sonnets of the 1960s; and the 'Radio Forth Rhymes' of the 1970s. Examining these will demonstrate that, far from making him a 'local' poet, Garioch's

<sup>1</sup> *Scots Observer*, vol. 7, no. 367 (7 October 1933), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to J.K. Annand, 1 October 1955. [*GM*, p. 33]

<sup>3</sup> Sydney Tremayne. 'Robert Garioch' (obituary), *Akros* 47, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> James Caird. 'A Personal Appreciation', p. 71.

writing about Edinburgh is an outlet for his views on the wider world. Although writers have characterised Garioch as an Edinburgh poet, they tend to refer simply to his poems, ignoring almost completely the rest of his writing. Raymond Ross has summarised some of the columns in the *Scots Observer*, but there is no critical work on *The Masque of Edinburgh*, and the 'Radio Forth Rhymes' are barely mentioned, probably because of their ephemeral nature and perhaps also because of the unfamiliarity of the genre.

Yet these 'Radio Forth Rhymes' are only the final manifestation of an obsession with Edinburgh's day-to-day life that resurfaced throughout Garioch's career, and it is well worth examining them alongside Garioch's earliest writings, since this helps us appreciate all the better the constant arc of the trajectory of his writing. Garioch had been appointed as 'Poet Laureate' to the infant Radio Forth in late 1974 and agreed to provide a poem every week for broadcast. Three of these appear in the *Collected Poems*, and Maurice Lindsay's review of that book suggests that this was 'surely a mistake' and that they 'already read like out-dated doggerel'.<sup>5</sup> The opening lines of the first of these justify Lindsay's opinion:

Yes, that's the title of this piece I'm weaving on my loom,  
Poetically speaking, for my topic is 'Vroom-vroom'...<sup>6</sup>

As a matter of fact, this is one of the very worst of the Radio Forth poems and some at least deal with important issues. It is not clear whether the initial approach was made by Garioch or by the radio station, but the first paragraph of a letter from Hamish Wilson, Radio Forth's Arts and Drama Producer, shows that Garioch had submitted a poem in Scots called 'Election Broadcast' (which is not collected). Wilson says that:

I enjoyed the poem enormously but feel that whilst the Scots tongue is to myself and others of relatively small minority a great delight, it will tend not to be understood by a large number of our listeners. I would be grateful therefore if you would send me some other examples of your work in a somewhat less Scots mode and if you would let me know if you would be prepared to write in that style for broadcast on Forth.<sup>7</sup>

This would seem to have spurred Garioch to adopt the fourteen-syllable, four-line format which characterises all 100 of the poems which were broadcast, since the first is dated a month later on 12 January, 1975.<sup>8</sup> For the following two years he produced one poem every week, mostly humorous, but there are a couple on more serious topics.

<sup>5</sup> Maurice Lindsay. Review of Robert Garioch. *Collected Poems*, *Scottish Review Arts and Environment* 7 (Summer 1977), p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Garioch. *Collected Poems*. Edinburgh: Macdonald, p. 173. All further references to this book are abbreviated to *CP* and are embedded in the text.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Hamish Wilson, 10 December 1974. NLS, MS26564, fol. 184.

<sup>8</sup> In the 75 every poem is dated; the dates are roughly but not consistently one week apart. Since Radio Forth began transmissions on 22 January 1975, these are presumably recording dates.

Garioch knew the limitations of what he was writing, as a letter to Michael Schmidt (of Carcanet Press) makes clear:

The third lot of new things I have is thirty-one of what I call my pop-poems. I have been recording one per week since Radio Forth started. It is a commercial radio company. This is what some would call doggerel, though I doubt if that word has any meaning... I take these pop-poems seriously, but they are poohpoohed by the knowledgeable of course.<sup>9</sup>

The 'knowledgeable' would doubtless poohpooh a couplet such as this one from the first of the series, about Idi Amin's offer to become king of Scotland:

So a simple Black Watch soldier, though not exactly a king,  
Was appointed to a post of responsibility that amounted to much the same thing.<sup>10</sup> [ll. 21-22]

However, a later poem, about William MacGonagall, appears to make fun of these occasional stylistic lapses, and suggests Garioch humorously experimenting with a modern MacGonagall in ways that anticipate the W.N. Herbert of *Cabaret MacGonagall*:<sup>11</sup>

It isn't only that he's like that poet of Japan  
Who said, 'I try to get as many words into a line as I possibly can.'  
He does it all the time, of course, but, just the same, you'll find  
That's not the secret: it must have something to do with the workings of his unique mind.<sup>12</sup>  
[ll. 13-16]

The subject matter of the poems varies, but there are two main themes which confirm that these poems are closely related to large parts of Garioch's other work: one is reaction to current events (mainly quirky ones, but some political stories), and the other is the city of Edinburgh. Many of the topical poems display the writer's acute sense of the absurd, such as 'One Thing at a Time, Please', a response to the introduction of regulations prohibiting advertisers from associating alcohol with sexual performance. The verse is hilarious, bawdy and close to the bone:

No beefy sport with pint in hand, in amorous débacle,  
May seem all set to catch the lady with a flying tackle;  
There must be no suggestion that what makes her look so randy  
Is that she's just about to sink her second double brandy.<sup>13</sup> [ll. 5-8]

In terms of Garioch's writing as a whole, these poems are interesting because they allow us to compare his views of Edinburgh at each end of his life. The poem 'Oil-rig', with its bemused description of the stationing of an oil-rig in the River Forth, uses the same techniques of innocent bewilderment and tongue-in-cheek humour that are much in evidence in Garioch's first appearance in print, a regular series of articles on life in

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Michael Schmidt, 4 August 1975. [GM, p. 144]

<sup>10</sup> 'Bezonian' (Radio Forth 1). NLS, MS 26590, fols 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> W.N. Herbert. *Cabaret MacGonagall*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> 'The Poet, William McGonagall' (Radio Forth 61). NLS, MS26590, fol. 67.

<sup>13</sup> 'One Thing at a Time, Please' (Radio Forth 12). NLS, MS26590, fol. 15.



Edinburgh called (mainly) 'The Capital—Week by Week', in the *Scots Observer*.<sup>14</sup> Here is the beginning of that poem:

In Princes Street, the corner opposite the G.P.O.  
Has something quite undreamt of not so many years ago:  
A view, clear to the Firth of Forth, right over Leith and Pilrig,  
And, in the Firth, out there, is something very like an oil rig!<sup>15</sup> [ll. 1-4]

And here is a description of a similarly incongruous nautical incident from the 1930s, when the efficacy of the North Carr lightship was tested in the waters of the Forth before it departed for its home off the Fife coast:

It is all over now, but many douce citizens of Edinburgh are still of the opinion that the foghorn might have been tested somewhere else, a little farther from their pillows. At any rate, the makers of this powerful, if unmusical hooter may congratulate themselves upon having found a large number of witnesses ready and willing to swear in good earnest proof of its efficiency.<sup>16</sup>

Evidently Garioch's delight in the net-curtain twitching of the Edinburgh middle classes was established early on, even if the newspaper in which the column appeared was published on the west coast. Raymond Ross has written one article on Garioch's writing in the *Scots Observer* which, he recalls,

began life in 1926 under the editorship of the distinguished journalist William Power. It saw itself as a 'journalistic comrade-in-arms' of the Scottish Protestant Churches and, with Power at the helm, was nationalistic, intelligent, culturally alive and non-sectarian. Among its contributors were Lewis Spence, Hugh MacDiarmid, Willa Muir and Coia.<sup>17</sup>

More precisely, the first issue states that its main purpose was 'To strengthen and make socially manifest the spiritual leadership of the Scottish Protestant Churches' [*SO*, vol. 1 no. 1 (2 October 1933), p. 1.]. We may take issue at Ross's suggestion that the *Scots Observer* could be simultaneously 'non-sectarian' and 'journalistic comrade-in-arms' of the Scottish Protestant Churches; although the messages of support given in the first issue from the Baptist Union, Congregational Union, Wesleyan Methodist Church and even the Episcopal Church suggest that the definition of 'Protestant' is a wide one. But it is certainly true that, alongside articles on topics such as the temperance movement and Sunday observance, as well as details of appointments and events that occasionally give it the air of a high-minded church newsletter, the publication contains many articles on literary topics, and by its later issues there is a regular column called 'A Scots Calendar—A quotation for each day of the year, taken from Scottish literature, ancient

<sup>14</sup> Glasgow: Scottish Publications, 1926-34.

<sup>15</sup> 'Oil-rig' (Radio Forth 17). NLS, MS 26590, fol. 21.

<sup>16</sup> *Scots Observer*, vol. 7 no. 339 (8 April 1933), p. 7. All further references are abbreviated to *SO* and embedded in the text.

<sup>17</sup> Raymond Ross. 'Edinburgh Grooves: Robert Garioch's Edinburgh', *Cenrastus* 29 (Spring 1988), p. 6.

and modern'. (It goes without saying that there are also frequent angry letters to the editor from Hugh MacDiarmid.)

It is not clear where Robert Garioch fits into this slightly odd mixture, and there is no evidence of how he became involved with the publication. The first appearance of the name Robert Garioch in print (the columns were written anonymously) is below a poem called 'Princes Street Sunday':

Gode is luve,  
An Gode made leesure,  
Yae pairt leesure  
Ti sax pairts wark;  
Gode is luve  
An here is pleasure,  
Upoan ma sark!  
We'll yase in pleasure  
Oor Saubbath leesure,  
Fulfil God's pleasure,  
Guid Sunday wark! [*SO*, vol. 7 no. 337 (25 March 1933), p. 7]

The diction used is straightforward Anglicised Scots with only one dialect word ('sark'), but the resonances of Burns' 'Tam o' Shanter' which that word implies suggest that the poem is not quite as innocent as it appears on the surface. Whether there is a sexual undertone is not clear, but if there is then this is evidently an early appearance of Garioch's ability to poke fun at authority.

The major example of Garioch's verse to be printed in the *Scots Observer*, an early page-long version of *The Masque of Edinburgh*, also exhibits this trait. Although it is not (quite) as anarchic as the version that was published by Macdonald in the 1950s, it is still utterly unlike anything else that the paper printed, and the anarchy seems strangely out of place. One wonders what the readers of the *Scots Observer* made of the comic-book Highland soldiers, the farcical dream visions and stage directions such as this:

A maist camsteerie widdle steers up the hale clanjamphrey, Zeinty Teinty, Tithery Mithery, Irky Pirky, Tawrry Rope set about the lugs o the Reverend John Thomson, the Very Reverend Tom Johnstone, an the Scarcely Reverend John Thomas. John Knox casts his duddies ti the wark, wi shouts o Heave awaw, lads; the bust o Socrates, dancin the Mason's apron an birlin widdershins, tichtens his tairten nickey-tams, an jines battle wi his feyther's bestbequeathed chisel. Up stours a Corporation Fire-escape, crushing various Waiters, Tooncooncillors, an Persons wi nae Fixed Abode... [*SO*, vol. 7 no. 352 (8 July 1933), p. 9]

Similarly, one doubts that many of the *Scots Observer's* readers had ever encountered anything like the 'twa methsodden auld randies [that] pull each ither's hair jist ootside a close' as the masque concludes (or had considered describing them in such terms). Even more oddly the work is presented with no introduction, although perhaps the proprietors were minded to conceal the fact that the person responsible was a regular columnist. The only editorial comment is a small advertisement for the piece in the pre-

vious issue, but there is no evidence of any other active promotion of it. It seems inconceivable that there was no reaction from readers, but if there was it certainly did not make it into print, since the readers' letters in the following months ignore it entirely.

The *Masque* was expanded considerably for its republication in 1954. Its fantastical and farcical treatment of the city—using techniques which suggest the influence of Joyce and anticipate the technique of Sydney Goodsir Smith—makes it difficult to draw any serious conclusions about how it relates to Garioch's view of his home city, but the humour is certainly affectionate, and there is a very keen sense of the city's historical background which is, surprisingly, glimpsed only rarely in the other pieces of work about Edinburgh. This is often combined with skilful versifying, such as the hilarious (and relatively clean) version of 'The Ball of Kirriemuir' which lampoons anybody with any connection to the running of the city:

The Edwards cam a-reivin  
to see whit they cud tak.  
They stole oor Stan o Destiny  
an wudnae gie it back.

Singin Whaes is it this time,  
Whaes is it noo?  
The yin that had it last time,  
He haesnae got it noo.<sup>18</sup>

The whole masque perpetuates this sarcastic but easygoing humour, and the appeal extends even to the ironic homeliness of the stage directions:

During the last verse or twa, we've been hearing the Toon Guaird's tune, 'Jockie to the Fair,' an noo it gets gey loud as some chiel screws up the lood-speaker ahint the scenes. [*GM*, p. 115]

'The Capital—Week by Week', by contrast, is more respectful but still seems lively nearly seventy years after it was written; even the mock-philosophical comment which begins the first column is slightly tongue-in-cheek: 'Edinburgh's a queerlike town. It is surely unique among cities in respect of the mingling of pride and shame that one meets with in [sic] its citizens' [*SO*, vol. 7 no. 335 (4 March 1933), p. 4]. This keenness was perhaps a reflection of the attitude of the editor, since Garioch recalls in his interview with Donald Campbell that 'That was a grand thing!... I had my column there... and I could have had a whole page if I liked. Very generous! And they printed anything in way of verse that I wrote. They printed anything!'<sup>19</sup> The majority of the writing is interesting and well enough crafted to repay substantial reproduction. Garioch covers a wide variety of topics, some of which recur frequently: he is consistently impressed with Donald Tovey's Sunday evening concerts, which were a major cultural event in

<sup>18</sup> *GM*, pp. 123–4 (this book reprints the 1954 version of *The Masque of Edinburgh* in its entirety).

<sup>19</sup> 'Robert Garioch—A Conversation with Donald Campbell', *Cenrastus* 6 (Autumn 1981), p. 13.

Edinburgh at that time,<sup>20</sup> and often talks about music in general; he also makes regular comments about Scottish nationalism. There is an interesting glimpse of his future employment as a 'lexicographer's orraman' in this extract:

It is amusing to note that in the very palatial Head Office of one of the greatest of our Edinburgh banks there is said to be only one office dictionary, and that it is a most interesting orthographical relic which was purchased when the bank first began business some time in the late seventeenth century. Some day, perhaps, I shall collect all extant and available letters that have issued from this office and set to work on a Thesis on 'The Influence of 17th Century Orthography on the Correspondence of a Scottish Bank'. [SO, vol. 7 no. 340 (15 April 1933), p. 7]

What is particularly fascinating is that, even at this stage, Garioch's interests and hobby horses are becoming familiar. One column contains a complaint about the bad state of Edinburgh's fountains; this is prefaced by the comment that 'In venturing to discuss the inscrutable ways of Town Councils one is walking, of course, on holy ground, yet I cannot wholly avoid a little speculation...' [SO, vol. 7 no. 362 (2 September 1933), p. 6]. Already the machinations of local politicians are being regarded with suspicion. A more extensive social comment is worth regarding in the context of 'Fi'baw in the Street' which was one of Garioch's very earliest poems, written while he was at university; in fact, it just predates the column in the *Scots Observer*. It shows how acute an observer Garioch was of people's actions and foibles:

Small boys belong to a curious and interesting species, and might prove even more so if only one could pin them down to corks and examine them through sheets of glass. But their childish ways, if amusing in perspective, are apt to receive scant sympathy from the lieges when they tend upset our law-abiding ratepayers on their own pavements. There are fashions in all things, and I was surprised the other day to see two wee laddies playing with a 'guider' in spite of the fact that the guider season is not generally due till the month of June. A guider, by the way, is a vehicle evolved from the four-wheeled soap-box, the most distinctive mechanical detail being a device involving a penny nut-and-bolt whereby the front axle is made to swivel, the whole contraption being thus guided (sic) by a piece of string tied to the front axle. Motive power is derived from the physical efforts of one or two small boys who shove; these functionaries are known as 'shovers', a name not lacking in a certain dignity reflected from its likeness to the aristocratic 'chauffeur'. I found these two guider enthusiasts making good speed among the many vulnerable legs that are always to be found on the pavement at the East-end of Princes Street, and I could not but admire the dexterity with which that guider was steered through the traffic. The activities of a street urchin, however, are sadly circumscribed, and as I had my last glimpse of these two small boys they were being very effectively discouraged by a very tall policeman. [SO, vol. 7 no. 341 (22 April 1933), p. 7]

This passage is notable for its lightness of touch and its easygoing humour. We might also note the sneaking sympathy for those who stand up to figures of petty authority and an almost mock-heroic respect for something which is, on the surface, banal—two qualities which are, as we shall see, integral to the Edinburgh Sonnets.

<sup>20</sup> James Caird recalls that 'In the early 1930s I would often see him at one of Professor Tovey's Sunday concerts in the gallery in the Usher Hall'. James Caird, 'A Personal Appreciation', p. 71.

There are interesting variations in the tone of these articles. An early comment about a debate at the Edinburgh University Union, at which Christopher Grieve was speaking, is revealing: we hear that the motion was 'that the Scottish Renaissance is an attempt on the part of a few individuals to foist something upon a public which does not want it. I have forgotten the actual words of the motion, but they amounted to something of this sort.' [*SO*, vol. 8 no. 377 (16 December 1933), p. 10] The judgemental tone of these words is telling. However, in other respects, Garioch's intentions were less clear, and at least one reader misinterpreted the occasionally sarcastic writing about Edinburgh enough to comment that he felt the writer had 'a dislike of Edinburgh, and a distaste of the people who live in it'. This prompts a heartfelt denial:

To live in Edinburgh is to enjoy a work of art. It is not a perfect work of art; there is nothing of the heroic couplet about our city, and its beauty has no affinities either with the unremarkable Sunday suits of Lawrence's Socialists, or with the remarkable sartorial formalities of Mozart. Sir Walter's 'own romantic town' has the Romantic qualities of Shakespeare and of Wagner. Anything may happen in Edinburgh, and all sorts of things do happen; and the concoction of these events well shaken up together makes a quite delightfully exhilarating mixture.

I love Edinburgh, and the loved things are many. I delight in the quirks of the High Street houses, whilst the spacious squares and crescents of the New Town are there when I need them to give me a sense of quiet and of nobility. There is an infinity of entertainment in Princes Street, with its crowds that vary in character from hour to hour, and even this most patrician of streets takes part in the general Rabelaisian humour of Edinburgh by casting a kind of shadow that is Rose Street, that street of a thousand taverns to describe which is impossible in any terms but those of Chaucer, whose diction enables us to class it as the best envyned street in Europe. [*SO*, vol. 7, no. 367 (7 October 1933), p. 6]

This comment encapsulates Edinburgh's appeal to Garioch and quantifies what inspired him to write; perhaps the strength of feeling explains why Garioch was able to overcome his later trauma and return to Edinburgh.

One can understand the reader's confusion, however. There are times when the parody and reaching down to earth go to extremes, such as the pæan to Granton's particular civic monument:

In the matter of buildings we have embellished our coast with several extraordinary landmarks. To an active imagination, the bay at Musselburgh might possibly be thought remotely similar to the Bay of Naples, were it not crowned by a gasworks instead of a volcano. The principal building in Portobello is a huge power-station. But for sheer impressiveness, the palm must go to Granton Gasometer... If you climb any of the hills around the city, you are rewarded by a view of the gasometer. You see it from the Castle ramparts, from the wooded crest of Rest-and-be-thankful at Corstorphine... There is no getting away from it. [*SO*, vol. 7 no. 351 (1 July 1933), p. 7]

The tongue is implanted so firmly in the cheek here that there is little wonder that some readers took it at face value. But the columns are not entirely light-hearted, and when Garioch deals with the literary ignorance of contemporary Scots he can be serious and even critical [*SO*, vol. 7 no. 364 (16 September 1933), p. 6]. A later article describes the pressures that were, even in the 1930s, contributing to the decline of broad Scots:

Even children who speak in the streets in the rough tongue of Edinburgh or Leith undergo a change when in the presence of print; and I have noticed at children's concerts that they will sing even Scots songs in the approved English of the schoolroom. We thus learn in school to be bilingual; we develop a habit of relegating our native dialect to informal times and places, and feel just a little surprised when we find a good and serious work written in something approaching our native speech. This I take to be the answer to those who see affectation or artificiality in literature written in Scots: our Scottish writers are forced by the false position in which circumstance has placed them, to become natural by artificial methods; whereas our forefathers remained themselves in spite of their affectation of English ways. [*SO* vol. 8 no. 381 (13 January 1934), p. 6]

These are the same concerns that Garioch raised in his article 'Purity or Smeddum', which had appeared in the paper the previous February.

The column ceased when the *Scots Observer* ceased publishing quite abruptly in 1934. Edinburgh is central to these early writings, just as it was to the final 'Radio Forth Rhymes', but Garioch's Edinburgh looks towards such verbally exuberant writers as Joyce and MacGonagall, Burns and Sydney Goodsir Smith, rather than simply or even principally towards the city's earlier laureate, Robert Fergusson.

The 1940s were a period of upheaval for Garioch, who left Edinburgh in 1941 after a brief spell teaching primary children, and joined the Royal Signals, with whom he served in North Africa before being imprisoned in Italy and Germany. On his release he did several schoolteaching jobs in London and Kent and it was only in 1959 that he returned to Edinburgh.<sup>21</sup> It was during this period, as he recalled to Donald Campbell, that he wrote the Edinburgh Sonnets: 'They came along, most of them, after we came back home'.<sup>22</sup> Yet despite the passing of three decades, the city Garioch describes seems extremely similar to the one which is so familiar from 'The Capital—Week by Week'. 'Ane Offering for Easter', for example, exhibits the same heavily ironic view of Edinburgh being compared with places far grander:

Reading a sonnet by Giuseppe Belli,  
ye come across, preserv'd in rhyme, some hammy,  
lang, thick and phallic Eastertide salami,  
regeneration-symbols, sae they tell ye  
  
in a fitt-note, sprecklit inside wi yelly

<sup>21</sup> These dates are taken from an article by George Rosie, 'Stalag 8B: the great adventure', about Garioch's wartime experiences. *Radio Times*, 26 February–4 March 1977, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> 'A Conversation with Donald Campbell', p. 13. The Edinburgh Sonnets do not form a contiguous whole. In the *Selected Poems* they are collected as 'Saxteen Edinburgh Sonnets'; they appear in the same order in the *Collected Poems*, but with several other sonnets added and no title. This order is preserved in the *Complete Poetical Works* but with the addition of more poems. The introduction suggests that 'right into the 1970s Garioch added new ones with numbers according to [the] original scheme, so he obviously thought of them as belonging to a group' [*CPW*, p. viii]. Since there are several other sonnets about Edinburgh which are not in this sequence, and since Garioch was inconsistent in his use of the collective title, I have taken the phrase 'Edinburgh Sonnets' as a loose term to cover all the sonnets about Edinburgh, whether or not they appeared in any of the sequences.

fat-gobbets, oozy in the sunshine, clammy  
(I mind yon fourteen-inchers in Chiami)  
wi draps of sweit, suet and smelly.

Nou shairly we wyce folk of Oddanbeery,  
no in the habit, certainly, of haudin  
Easter, the way they dae in Rome, are learie

eneuch to find our counterpart. A sudden  
thocht has occurred to your auld makar, Garioch:  
let's venerate a hame-made mealie-pudden. [*CPW*, p. 8r]

Although this particular poem is unusual in that it is only tangentially connected with Edinburgh, it shows off Garioch's imagination in linking something comparatively exotic and foreign with the humble 'mealie-pudden', and he has the sense of irony to make it work. Garioch's technique here is, appropriately, identical to how he treats his translations of the Belli sonnets, relishing rhymes that teeter between Byron and MacGonagall and pushing the rhythmic structure to its limits. He even goes to the lengths of mispronouncing his own name.<sup>23</sup>

This poem typifies the mock-heroic approach to Edinburgh which is Garioch's signature. However, it lacks the distinctive trait of most of the Edinburgh Sonnets, the personality of the narrator. This is the side of Garioch where, as Alexander Scott has suggested,

he presents himself in poetry as a drop-out, speaking dialect, writing in the language of the pub, and preferring the company of drouthy drinkers to the acquaintance of the respectable. In various sizes, shapes and forms, the underdog who bites the ankles of the powerful and the pretentious is the truly dominant character in most of the hilarious contributions to his 'Sixteen Edinburgh Sonnets'.<sup>24</sup>

'Glisk of the Great', a taut and effective piece, shows this technique well. The opening quatrain establishes perfectly the slightly sleazy atmosphere of a minor celebrity and local politicians falling over each other to ingratiate themselves with each other, and satirises them mercifully:

<sup>23</sup> As a note in the *Collected Poems* makes clear, 'the rhyme Garioch, Oddanbeery (this word invented by Sydney Goodsir Smith) makes emergency use of the Aberdeen pronunciation'. [*CP*, p. 198.] In contrast, a letter written to J.K. Annand in the form of a poem finishes thus:

I dout I've taen an awfy time  
to say I'll gie your phone a chime  
and dram wi ye, & gae hame syne  
on scaffy's barry—och,  
it's taen sae lang to find a rhyme  
for—

Yours aye,

Garioch [Letter to J.K. Annand, 7 July 1956. *GM*, p. 34]

<sup>24</sup> 'Alexander Scott on the Written Word' [Jubilee Talks no. 1], *Scottish Review Arts and Environment* 7 (Summer 1977), pp. 2-3.

I saw him comin out the N.B. Grill,  
creashy and winey, wi his famous voice  
crackin some comic bawr to please three choice  
notorious bailies, lauchan fit to kill. [*CPW*, p. 81]

Garioch's vocabulary here is particularly well chosen, and aids the satire: the choice of the word 'winey' to describe their imbibing sounds particularly unattractive, especially when juxtaposed with the word 'creashy' (which Garioch glosses as 'greasy'). Our suspicions are heightened by the celebrity's anonymity, but the fact that the joke (which is also glossed over) is aided by 'his famous voice' comes over as a pejorative statement. Meanwhile, the ludicrous appellation of the adjective 'notorious' to the bailies adds to the surreal air but alludes to the air of corruption hanging over Scottish local government. In the following quatrain the demystification continues:

Sync thae fowre crousie cronies clam intill  
a muckle big municipal Rolls-Royce,  
and disappeared, aye lauchan, wi a noise  
that droont the traffic, towards the Calton Hill. [*CPW*, p. 81]

One senses that the very phrase 'municipal Rolls-Royce' carries an element of criticism; the criticism is compounded by the use of the word 'clam' to describe their method of entry. However, the satire really kicks in in the sestet, where the faux naïf commentator gives his reading of the incident:

As they rade by, it seemed the sun was shinin  
brichter nor usual roun thae cantie three  
that wi thon weill-kent Heid-yin had been dinin.  
  
Nou that's the kinna thing I like to see;  
tho ye and I look on and canna jyne in,  
it gies our toun some tone, ye'll aa agree. [*CPW*, p. 81]

There is a deliberate contradiction between the ostentatious display of 'democracy' at work and the fact that 'ye and I look on and canna jyne in'. This line also displays Garioch's cocky exploitation of the sonnet form and the way he moulds his Scots around it; a rhyme between 'dinin' and 'jyne in' has the potential to be pretty tortuous but it works here.

However, Garioch's venom is not restricted to mediocre politicians. He has little time for pretentious artists either. 'I was fair beat' is a good example:

I spent a nicht amang the cognoscenti,  
a hie-brou clan, ilk wi a beard on him  
like Mark Twain's miners, due to hae a trim,  
their years on aiverage round three-and-twenty.  
  
Of poetry and music we had plenty,  
owre muckle, but ye maun be in the swim:  
Kurt Schwitters' Ur-sonata that gaes 'Grimm  
glimm gnimm bimmbimm,' it fairly wad hae sent ye



daft, if ye'd been there; modern jazz wi juicy  
snell wud-wind chords, three new yins, I heard say  
by thaim that ken't, new, that is, sen Debussy.

Man, it was awfie, I wad raither hae  
a serenata sung by a randy pussy,  
and what a time a reel of tape can play! [*CPW*, p. 85]

Once again, Garioch couches understated but nasty criticism of shallow people within the formal disguise of the sonnet. This poem is summarised nicely by Robert Nye as 'the one about having a piece of unpleasant avant garde music at some student party on a tape-recorder'.<sup>25</sup> There is a delicate understatement in the way the poet uses the term 'cognoscenti' to describe the people with whom he is forced to spend the evening—with their overgrown beards and superior knowledge they ought to be rather older than their average age of twenty-three years, slipped in to the fourth line, would suggest. The understated description hides what looks like a pretty grim evening. Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948), a German who settled in the Lake District after the war, composed his *Ursonate* (or *The Primordial Sonata*) in the 1920s: it is a Dadaist work for solo voice, and consists of forty minutes of unpitched nonsense ('Grimm/ glimm grimm bimbimbim' is, in fact, an exact quotation from the work; another typical example is 'Fünns bö wö tää Uu, pögiff, kwiiee'). The composer made clear that he liked to perform the work in public himself, and a recording has been made of this,<sup>26</sup> which explains the pained exclamation 'and what a time a reel of tape can play!', and underlines the cultural hostility that the work has provoked, although any remaining artistic pretension is punctured by the previous two lines. However, the precision of the quotation from the work shows that the 'drop-out' is not quite as ignorant as we are led to believe.

Garioch's low tolerance of pretension in other people seems obvious, but in fact the persona of the narrator often occupies a complex position, as Garioch's altercation with a dog-owner in 'Nemo Canem Impune Lacessit' makes clear:

I kicked an Edinbro dug-lover's dug,  
leastweys I tried; my timing wes owre late.  
It stopped whit it wes daein til my gate  
and skelpit aff to find some ither mug.

Whit a sensation! If a clockwark thug  
suid crown ye wi a brolly owre yir pate,  
the Embro folk wad leave ye til yir fate;  
it's you, maist like, wad get a flee in yir lug.

But kick the Friend of Man! Or hae a try!

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Robert Nye, 10 October 1974. NLS, MS26564, fol. 173.

<sup>26</sup> It appears in a touring exhibition entitled 'Dream Machines'. The composer suggests that 'the right of criticism is reserved to those who have achieved a full understanding' (quoted in the exhibition catalogue, *Dream Machines*, ed. Susan Hiller. London: Hayward Gallery, 2000. [no page numbers]).

The Friend of Wummin, even, that's faur waur  
a felony, mair dangerous forbye.

Meddle wi puir dumb craiturs gin ye daur;  
that maks ye a richt cruel bruite, my! my!  
And whit d'ye think yir braw front yett is for? [CPW, p. 90]

Here much of the humour comes from the 'drop-out' persona referred to by Alexander Scott and the contrast between this character's simplistic and ill-behaved outlook and the well-heeled but awful subjects of the poem. There is already an outrageous contrast between the Latin of the title and the fact that the subject of the poem directly below is that 'I kicked an Edinbro dug-lover's dug'. But despite the seemingly simple device of ironic contrast lies quite a complex joke. First, the phraseology is important: it is not just the fact that the poet 'kicked a dug' that is important; *more* important is the fact that the poor creature belongs to an 'Edinbro dug-lover'—this is perhaps a mitigating circumstance. But the contrast between the title and the first line is heightened when we bear in mind that the Latin phrase is a bastardisation of the motto of the Scottish Kings, 'Nemo Me Impune Lacessit'—nobody wounds me with impunity. Given what happens to the poet this title is hilariously appropriate, but there is a more subtle humour in this mock-heroic contrast. The humour continues in the second line, where it is revealed that the kick was no accident but a quite deliberate act. The blatant nature of the poet's violence towards the dog, despite what it was doing to his property, tends to obscure the social commentary which lies beneath the self-deprecatory writing (the choice of the phrase 'some ither mug' in line four implying, of course, that the poet is one too), which is that he lives in a place where the 'Embro folk' will happily ignore human suffering but intervene when an animal is at risk, and will at the same time make ridiculous nosey comments, such as 'whit d'ye think yir braw front yett is for?'. The 'drop-out' persona is patently a caricature, but of whom? It would, of course, be convenient if it were a caricature of Garioch himself, since the incidents described in the sonnets are precisely the kind of occurrences which amuse Garioch in his other writings about Edinburgh. Indeed, in the poem 'A Fair Cop'—note the amusing pun in the title—we are forced to reconcile the poet's public indecency and rather sexist opinions with the autobiographical turn of phrase in the second line:

Castalian Scots, nou may ye cry, Allace!  
sen your True Rhymer, Garioch, met a leddy  
polis, maist unexpekit, in a shady  
neuk near Tollcross, and nou he's in disgrace.

She met him, rather, but in onie case  
it maks nae odds; she got her notebuik ready,  
lickit her keelivine, and, jeez! she said he  
wes 'urinating in a public place.'

Her very words, a richt wee caution! Pray  
forgie me thon expression in nine letters,

a terrible expense: seevin wad dae.

Fending us aa frae muggers and sic craiturs,  
the Polis are maist eydent, I daursay,  
but fancy fashin wi sic piddlan maitters! [*CPW*, p. 91]

It doesn't take too much imagination to work out the seven-letter word alluded to in the sestet. Garioch seems to be playing with the perception of whether he has a personal involvement. Although the use of the phrase 'your True Rhymer, Garioch' is on one level a rhetorical device and (as we have seen elsewhere) a useful way of filling up the stresses and a method of injecting 'high' literary atmosphere, on another level it manages both to implicate the author's personal involvement (already implied by the use of the word 'Castalian', a nod to the literary patronage of James VI) by naming him, and to distance him by referring to him in the third person. The person changes in the sestet and there is a general comment about the Police—perhaps the roles have been reversed and Garioch's 'drop-out' is (by way of revenge?) telling a story about the hapless poet, who is concerned to have been lifted by a 'leddy polis' (whose sex is, after all, not relevant). The level of hidden detail in this poem does serve to remind us that there is considerably more depth to these sonnets than is initially obvious.

As has already been established, Garioch wrote the bulk of the Edinburgh sonnets during the 1960s. At more or less the same time Edwin Morgan was writing his *Glasgow Sonnets*, which were published in 1972.<sup>27</sup> It is interesting that this should have been the case, since the two poets were colleagues at this time on *Scottish International Review*, which was launched in 1968. It was edited by Robert Tait, but Garioch and Morgan were joint editorial advisors and were responsible for the literary content. The *Glasgow Sonnets* are a deliberate sequence while Garioch's are independent of each other, but the two works are an interesting comparison between two writers' opinions of Scotland's two major cities at the same point in time. One may think of Morgan as a very contemporary poet and of Garioch as somewhat old-fashioned, but in an interview with me Edwin Morgan suggested that Garioch was in fact 'quite surprisingly interested in what was happening even on the wilder shores of Scottish writing... in that period, the 1960s. He like me found it a very liberating period, discovered parts of himself I think that he hadn't realised he had before'.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, with hindsight Garioch's sonnets seem quite timeless, while Morgan's seem strangely dated, with their quite specific concern with the sit-in at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders during the early 1970s and the economic uncertainty afflicting Glasgow and Scotland at that point in time.

<sup>27</sup> Edwin Morgan. *Glasgow Sonnets*. West Linton: Castlelaw Press, 1972.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Edwin Morgan, 19 Whittingehame Court, Glasgow, 28 January 2000.

The two writers take radically different approaches to their subjects. Garioch's resistance to change is a mirror image of Morgan's zeal that reconstruction is the only way out of trouble: we could contrast Garioch's sarcastic description of the David Hume Tower at Edinburgh University ('A Wee Local Scandal' [*CPW*, p. 89]), 'yon muckle black rectangle in the air', which 'fair/obliterates Arthur's Seat', with Morgan's distrust of the preservation movement:

Prop up's the motto. Splint the dying age.  
Never displease the watchers from the grave. [p. 11]

There are differences too in the way the writers treat the sonnet form, but their techniques are the opposite of what one might expect. The *Glasgow Sonnets* are very traditional and their adherence to the rhyme scheme is, for Morgan, unusually strict; Garioch seems the happier of the two to push the form to its boundaries, to use unconventional rhymes and to surprise the reader—or at least that is one's impression. In fact, Garioch's review of Morgan's sonnets in *Lines Review* underlines (intentionally or otherwise) how Morgan exploits Garioch's own technical tricks:

We may write smooth sonnets by using dull and plentiful rhymes, but Mr Morgan prefers to tease our interest by using words of rarer sound, placing an extraordinary word first as though it were there inevitably, and then introducing words that seem to fit in easily, or else delighting us with seemingly superhuman efforts. So Sonnet viii starts in a fine confident manner that leads to difficult rhyming territory—'Meanwhile the flyovers breed loops of light/ in curves that would have ravished tragic Toshie...'. Only Toshie will serve here; what is to be done? Well, we have *wishy-washy* (nae bother—two more to go), then the virtuosic *Sauchie Hauch she* in the best position for that sort of thing, with *splosy* coming in without fuss to conclude this part of the performance. All this showing-off is artistically justified, as the poem is about these daring new structures that appear to have insufficient visible means of support.<sup>29</sup>

However, for all their differences in approach and execution, both poets set out to write poems that reveal the city for what it is, rather than an idealised version of what it once was or should be. Edwin Morgan acknowledges this, and says that

the sequence of 'Glasgow Sonnets' was written at a time when things were not good in Glasgow; I took up themes of unemployment, housing and things of that sort, almost as a kind of programme—they're meant to be political sonnets. I don't think Garioch does that so much: it does come in but it's often done in a more glancing, more mocking kind of way... There's probably a difference in intention... but there are parallels too... I thought it was quite possible to write about what was wrong with Glasgow: ...we probably both felt it hadn't been very much done in the past, especially with Glasgow, but even with Edinburgh: Garioch was so fond of Robert Fergusson because Fergusson was... almost the first person to write about Edinburgh in a way that... gives a picture of what Edinburgh was like but was also concerned with what Edinburgh might be or should be... I was attempting a deeper analysis of what was happening to the city.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Robert Garioch. Review of Edwin Morgan. *Glasgow Sonnets*, *Lines Review* 45 (1973), p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Edwin Morgan, 28 January 2000.

Morgan's comment about a difference of intention is interesting. This difference is most apparent when Garioch tackles an unexpected subject such as gang warfare—something far more likely to be approached by Morgan—as he does in the sonnet 'I'm Neutral' [*CPW*, p. 82]. It treats a serious problem in an almost inappropriately light-hearted and reductive way, when the poet is accosted by a thug because of the length of his nose. The poet's lack of concern is both admirable and worrying: the line 'I wasna fasht, I took him for a moron' would seem to imply a dangerous nonchalance, but the anticlimactic final line—'Aweill, I caa'd him owre, and that was that'—shows the reward of this approach, as the poet shoves him over and walks away. This poem shows as much humorous fantasy as Morgan's sonnets show gritty reality (though it can be read allegorically too) but the radically divergent approaches mask the fact that the two writers are simply portraying aspects of contemporary city life in different ways: satire is Garioch's weapon, while Morgan prefers to be political. Both writers manage to produce works that combine a great affection and love for their respective cities with a regret about their treatment and their ills—Edinburgh and Glasgow were not at their best during the 1960s and 1970s. And, as Morgan acknowledges, while the approaches to the subject differ, there are often similarities in the method: 'Clearly we both at times take up something occasional, something that has happened that we want to comment on in some sort of way, we both do that'.<sup>31</sup> In each case the sonnet sequence is a major landmark in the poet's output, and a significant part of that success is the knowledge of each city that it brings to their poetry.

There is no question that the Edinburgh Sonnets are the most accomplished of Garioch's writing about Edinburgh: their grasp of wit, humour and irony, their technical accomplishment and their deep-seated familiarity with the city makes sure of this and proves that they are an achievement equal to Morgan's *Glasgow Sonnets*. Nevertheless, the other writing about Edinburgh shows a consistency of outlook with the sonnets, and even in the year of its demise Edinburgh Corporation was held up to ridicule. One of its final acts, evidently, was the appointment of a *second* handyman for the municipal still room (in a time of great economic hardship and uncertainty). The third Radio Forth poem satirises this, and concludes with the ironic comment:

Now in these cold and meagre days of scrimping and privation,  
Let's praise our open-handed Edinburgh Corporation  
Who keep their handyman in work full-time with his cork-screw,  
And may his services extend, some day, to me and you!<sup>32</sup> [ll. 29–32]

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Edwin Morgan, 28 January 2000.

<sup>32</sup> 'Simon' (Radio Forth 3). NLS, MS 26590, fol. 5.

Some hope, one is tempted to reply. Here Garioch shows himself to be at one with his fellow citizens of Edinburgh, a unity which contributes to the success of these works. Edinburgh was a great source of inspiration to Garioch, and was subject-matter that stayed with him throughout a long poetic career. His poems about Edinburgh life manage to rise above being mere 'local' poetry and use the city as a tool to comment on the wider world. However, it would be wrong to suggest that Garioch was only able to do this through the medium of Edinburgh, and in fact some of his best work is poetry which is independent of the city entirely.

### CHAPTER III

## Freedom and captivity: the longer poems

A battery hen with a mind of its own may seem an unpromising subject for a long poem, but 'The Canny Hen' is one of Robert Garioch's most appealing poems, rarely discussed in the same breath as 'The Bog', 'The Wire' and 'The Muir'. This is understandable, since the three poems, grouped together in the *Complete Poetical Works*, have some unity of theme, and there are grounds for regarding them as a set. I have already dealt with 'The Big Music' and 'To Robert Fergusson' in Chapter I; here I wish to examine the other major long poems in the detail they deserve, since they have been regarded widely—though certainly not universally—as Garioch's outstanding achievement. The impression of depth this lends to Garioch is to the benefit of his reputation. As has been made clear already, that reputation has often been troubled by a rather narrow interpretation of his style. The long poem was a significant presence in the literature of Scotland in the twentieth century, mainly because of the importance attached to the form by MacDiarmid. Garioch's long poems are, as might be expected, rather different from those, but it should become clear that, in some ways, Garioch fulfils the intellectual agenda set by MacDiarmid, and that the long poems form a cohesive set which is intellectually rewarding.

So why does 'The Canny Hen' form part of this discussion? It is an obvious poetry-reading piece which may seem to fit uneasily with the likes of 'The Muir', but it does have a similarly serious moral. As well as being an effective beast fable, it is a typical humorous Garioch poem, with its skilful yet playful use of rhythm and rhyme—'mustard' and 'flustert', 'thaim that ken tricks' and 'egocentrics' are rhymed with ease and control, in a way that will now be familiar. However, the laid-back technical control and the humorous succession of rhyming couplets mask a serious message, a protest against battery farming in particular but also a diatribe against monotony in all forms of work (a topic to which Garioch returned, and treated similarly, some years later<sup>1</sup>). The poem begins with an unfavourable description of progress:

Whan science wasna that faur-ben  
as it is nou, the fairmyard hen  
gaed lowse, to scart up what she micht.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the Radio Forth Rhymes [no. 97, June 1977] is entitled 'The Battery Hen Speaks'. It concludes with a similar comparison of the hen's condition to the human condition and a similar emphasis on the importance of human freedom:

That expert's so efficient at conditioning us hens,  
We suit his purposes in our neat rows of little pens;  
Maybe his methods might be made to work with people too,  
Take a good look at me. He may be planning this for you! [NLS, MS26590, fol. 113]

She peck'd a levin up aa richt  
 and laid eggs fu of vitamins,  
 no like the kind ye get in tins,  
 that pleas'd the fairmer weill eneuch  
 and gied him virr to guide the pleuch.  
 But we ken better of sic maitters;  
 we're maybe peeliewallie craturs  
 to luik at, in our stuirie cities,  
 but at technique ye canna beat us. [CPW, p. 125]

From the first the atmosphere is sceptical: the irony in the first line becomes apparent further on when the simplicity of the hen's life in the past is contrasted with contemporary methods, which are presented in ridiculous way where the outcome seems almost to be accidental: we then hear that the hen 'sterts to lay/ for lack of muckle else to dae'. The same slightly mocking voice also points out that her eggs

...trunnil down atween her legs  
 ayont her reach, tho near at haund,  
 a thing she canna understaund. [CPW, p. 125]

This is a prelude to the story of Blackie, a particularly enterprising battery hen who protests at her treatment by catching her eggs before they run away and bursting them with her beak. This is described simply but in a way which points out the complex irony of the situation:

Och, it was braw to steeve her poke  
 wi sic a clart of white and yoke.  
 It made her fu and unco happy,  
 like folk whan they hae taen a drappy.  
 Syne, like a wifie on a creepie  
 contentit-like and unco sleepy,  
 she laid her heid ablow her wing.  
  
 A! Fredome is a noble thing!  
 and kinna scarce, to tell the truth,  
 for naebody has muckle rowth  
 of fredome gin he warks for wages,  
 nae mair nor in the Middle Ages. [CPW, p. 126]

There is something absurd about that interjection of 'A! Fredome is a noble thing!', a line from John Barbour's *Brus*—a long-standing and serious work of Scottish history and literature—into this seemingly frivolous beast fable, but it actually has the effect of lending the poem some gravity, though of a rather ironic kind.<sup>2</sup> This irony only aids the morality of the poem, however, as it makes more palatable a message which could easily become trite and obvious; similarly, the couplet 'Aa things are sinfu, ye'll agree/ that dinna suit the pouers that be', for example, is close to the truth yet still amusing. Like

<sup>2</sup> The quotation is from l. 225 of Book 1. John Barbour. *The Bruce*, ed. A.A.M. Duncan. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997, p. 57.



Garioch's work in some other forms, this passage draws on Scottish poetic tradition, here that of the beast-fable, particularly as handled by its best known exponent, Robert Henryson; as will become clear later there are echoes of Henryson in some of the other long poems too. Here the moral is made clear after the farmer's attempt to discourage Blackie's behaviour by feeding her a mustard-filled egg, which backfires when the hen stops eating altogether.

Blackie was like a cheengit cratur.  
 She kent owre muckle nou, smaa wonder  
 the sicht of pellets garr'd her scunner;  
 food for the mechanised wee hen  
 to turn out eggs that hungry men  
 may staw their wames and hae a feast  
 on things that luik like eggs, at least,  
 and gae to wark at their machines  
 till the meal-hour brings plates of greens  
 grown in saw-dust frae fertilisers  
 and syne their medical advisers  
 prescribe wee pills and siclike tonics;  
 man canna live by hydroponics.  
 The modern warld gaed its wey,  
 but wicked Blackie wadna pley. [*CPW*, pp. 127-8]

With the hen refusing to eat, too thin to be boiled, she is let free in the garden and soon begins to lay wholesome eggs 'trulie worth the hacin' [*CPW*, p. 128], and the poem ends with the moral 'Jist follow Blackie's plan/ and be as naiteral as ye can' [*CPW*, p. 128]. The moral is superficially a homely one, that the food we eat should be as natural and untouched as possible, but the real moral is weightier: the comment that 'naeboddy has muckle rowth/ of fredome gin he warks for wages' encourages us to conclude that Garioch is suggesting that what is good enough for Blackie is good enough for us and that intolerable working conditions are counter-productive (one senses, not for the first time, the intrusion of Garioch's own dissatisfaction with his work as a schoolteacher). In a poem which predates the other long poems by some years<sup>3</sup> the central theme of freedom is made obvious, both implicitly and explicitly (the quotation from Barbour comes after one of three line breaks in the poem).

One imagines that, had MacDiarmid wanted to write a poem on the topic of freedom, he might have been rather disinclined to write a humorous piece about a battery hen. Yet for all that Garioch's long poems are less exotic and considerably less lengthy than many of MacDiarmid's examples of the form, they do seem, however coincidentally, to subscribe to his agenda. This is particularly the case with 'The Muir' [*CPW*, p. 54], which could have been written in response to this extract from MacDiarmid's 1923 'A Theory of Scots Letters':

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Scott dates it at 1949 ('The Makar and the Mask', p. 12); the others date from the 1950s.

We base our belief in the possibility of a great Scottish Literary Renaissance, deriving its strength from the resources that lie latent and almost unsuspected in the Vernacular, upon the fact that the genius of our Vernacular enables us to secure with comparative ease the very effects and swift transitions which other literatures are for the most part unsuccessfully endeavouring to cultivate in languages that have a very different and inferior bias. Whatever the potentialities of the Doric may be, however, there cannot be a revival in the real sense of the word—a revival of the spirit as distinct from a mere renewed vogue of the letter—unless these potentialities are in accord with the newest and truest tendencies of human thought... If all that the Movement is to achieve is to preserve specimens of Braid Scots, archaic, imitative, belonging to a type of life that has passed and cannot return, in a sort of museum department of our consciousness—set apart from our vital preoccupations—it is a movement which not only cannot claim our support but compels our opposition...

It is a different matter, however, if an effort is to be made to really revive the Vernacular—to encourage the experimental exploitation of the unexplored possibilities of Vernacular expression. 'The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life.' Only in so far as the Vernacular has unused resources corresponding better than English does to the progressive expression of the distinctive characteristics of Scottish life—however much these may have been submerged, subverted, or camouflaged, by present conditions... has it possibilities of literary value.<sup>4</sup>

Garioch's poem was written a generation later—his own note says that 'the atomic passages are the outcome of my attempt to understand the 1953 Reith Lectures on *Science and the Common Understanding*, by J. Robert Oppenheimer' [*CPW*, p. 298]—but there is a conscious feeling in the poem that Garioch is fulfilling the intellectual programme suggested by MacDiarmid in the 1920s. Whether this is a deliberate act on Garioch's part is open to debate—the ambiguity of his relationship with MacDiarmid is dealt with elsewhere in this thesis—but certainly MacDiarmid, later in life, refused to recognise Garioch's contribution to this agenda. In an item entitled 'Two Scottish Poets' on the BBC programme *Review* in 1971 MacDiarmid, reclining in an armchair, is asked whether Garioch helped Scottish poetry back to its proper level. He replies:

He's done what he did do extremely well, and in his translations of Belli and others—Italian poet—he's done very well—but I don't think he's a creative poet of the kind we need in Scotland to reconstitute the independent Scottish tradition. He'd be horrified if you called him an intellectual; you'd also be very wrong if you did [smirks] and I think we need an intellectual who wouldn't be horrified to be called that and who couldn't be called anything else'.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this, it seems fairly clear that 'The Muir' is a brave and generally successful attempt to elevate the use of Scots above grim balladry and pawky humour to a more mature level. Tom Hubbard agrees that the poem, with its philosophical, theological

<sup>4</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid. 'A Theory of Scots Letters', repr. in *Hugh MacDiarmid: Selected Prose*, ed. Alan Riach. Manchester: Carcanet, 1992, pp. 19–20.

<sup>5</sup> *Review*, transmitted BBC2 11 June 1971. 'Two Scottish Poets' ed. by Angus Newton and dir. by Gavin Millar. Lest this seem a little unfair, it should be pointed out that there follows an interview with Garioch, who suggests that using Scots for political purposes is wrong, even the wrong way round. 'If you're going to be didactic you'd better write sermons in prose. Of course you can write sermons in prose and chop it up and serve it up as a kind of verse, but that's another matter, I've nothing to do with that...' Asked if he knows of any contemporary Scottish writers who do this, he replies, 'I've only heard rumours that there are people of that description but that's as far as I'm prepared to go'.

and scientific argument, 'amply fulfils MacDiarmid's demand for intellectuality in poetry'.<sup>6</sup> Edwin Morgan has written of how its

challenging use of Scots to deal with various layers of reality, from the subatomic probabilities of modern physics to the concretely imagined vision of Dante's hell, and from the delusions of Robert Fergusson in his madness to the ordinarily perceived world of earth and rock and sky, gives texture and toughness to a bold poem which is not afraid to be seen wrestling with ideas.<sup>7</sup>

The technical success of the poem lies in the combination of accessible scientific vocabulary—some of it coined in Scots by Garioch—and philosophy, which regards the purely scientific discussion about the nature of matter and the religious discussion about the nature of man's existence and life as two facets of the same topic. This success seems, in part, to be because Garioch is dealing with a topic with which he felt comfortable. In an interview with me George Davie recalled how 'Robert had a good knowledge of science... that was again a difference from MacDiarmid, who was a great man for science but he knew very little about it'.<sup>8</sup> Graham Tulloch has written at some length on Garioch's vocabulary in this poem, and contrasts his dictionary-trawling for appropriate old Scots terms with his use of contemporary terms, in both Scots and English:

...he returned to the much earlier Scottish tradition of using aureate language to supply suitable diction for a formal poem. As well as the word *aureate* itself, obsolete terms from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Scots like *estivall* (from Alexander Hume), *flume* 'river', *preclair* 'illustrious' (used by Dunbar) and *supern* 'in the heavens' are pressed into service as part of the poem's special diction. And, like most Scots poets since at least Fergusson, he drew on Scottish local dialect for words like the Aberdeenshire *tyauve* meaning 'toil' and the southern Scots *jurmumme* 'crush or mix up'.

Equally important as a model for the writing of twentieth-century Scots is his willingness to accept contemporary English terms as part of Scots diction. This applies to the technical, scientific language like *nucleus*, *quantum* and *radar* used in 'The Muir' and to the colloquial terms like *aggranoying*, *bevvay*, *bugger-all*, *commies* and *whopper* used in his less formal poems... [Garioch also] does make some attempt to coin Scots terms to describe nuclear physics and invents the not entirely convincing *haar-chammer* to express the idea of the physicist Charles Wilson's *cloud-chamber* but generally he retains the English terms... This use of colloquial diction in a formal poem like 'The Muir' is not out of place because it parallels a major device he uses to provide suitable formal Scots diction. This is the decision to use colloquial Scots words like *dunsch*, *shougle* and *splairge* in formal contexts. This expansion of the resources of formal Scots diction was necessary because Scots has been for so long predominantly associated with informal contexts. In short Garioch ranged far and wide to provide diction and grammar for the number of different styles of Scots appropriate to his wide range of subjects.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Tom Hubbard. 'Reintegrated Scots: the Post-MacDiarmid Makars', in *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. Cairns Craig, 4 vols. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987, vol 4, p. 181.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin Morgan. 'Robert Garioch 1909-1981' (obituary), *Lines Review* 77 (1981), p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with George Elder Davie, 155 Orchard Brae Gardens, Edinburgh, 16 May 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Graham Tulloch (with John C. Hall). 'Big Music and Skail Winds: the achievement of Robert Garioch and Sydney Goodsir Smith', *Lines Review* 88 (1994), pp. 14-15.

Tulloch comments on all the important aspects of Garioch's exploitation of vocabulary in this poem, but he does not mention the end result of this technique, the astonishing variety of register which ensures that, despite the deeply philosophical tone and the complex science, the poem never becomes repetitive or dull. We see the combination of some of these central oppositions—formal and informal vocabulary, scientific and literary references, a tone which is informed yet questioning—in this passage:

The samyn atom pleya a different pairt  
 frae time to time, as secondly we've leart,  
 cheengin frae state to state, for whatna cause  
 we canna tell, and whan the cheenges stairt  
 we ken-na. For we find in siccan laws  
 nae firm causality; as the chance faas  
 the atom cheenges state and gies out licht  
 or taks it in, as ilk experiment shaws,  
 aye in the same proportioun. Our sicht  
 is gien the lee by this: it seems the bricht  
 continuous rays vibrating frae the Sun  
 come disparat, as we hae seen at nicht  
 the tracer-bullets splairgin frae a gun,  
 ae quantum at a time, sae nou we maun  
 consider licht as quanta, or again,  
 at the same time, as waves, as we've aye duin.

And Fergusson gyte, gyte in Darien,  
 jummlin his heid wi thochts of Satan's den... [CPW, p. 38]

The description of Fergusson's madness which follows marks a change in tone from the highly descriptive to the questioning and the philosophical:

And thon's a ferlie that we never see  
 even in nuclear physics; tho we read  
 that atoms of Uranium can gie  
 their virr out for a gey lang while indeed,  
 they cheenge throu time and finish up as leid;  
 echt-thousan million years or thereabout  
 they hae a kind of life, and syne they're deid.  
 Ane endless trauchle that wad seem, nae dout,  
 to folk in Hell that cuidna manage out,  
 but no the same thing as eternity  
 wi flames imperishable as the soot  
 they mak in brennin; maitter and energy,  
 timeless, framed in perpetuity,  
 aye unconsumed, an everlasting rot,  
 an oxydising antiszygy  
 maybe a thocht congenial til a Scot. [CPW, pp. 58-9]

Though the issues raised—scientific and philosophical—are complex ones, they are presented in a way which maybe verges on the homely occasionally ('folk in Hell that cuidna manage out') but which is attractive and readable, with the occasional knowing wink to the reader (such as the last two lines here). This section also anticipates one of

the conclusions of the poem: that we should not place too much emphasis on the purely scientific explanation of matter, and should have the freedom to visualise it in other ways. In the closing lines of the poems it is summed up thus:

Glowran owre near at oniething, we kill  
the human meaning of this warld of stuir. [CPW, p. 66]

It is to Garioch's credit that he argues convincingly for a thesis which could be seen as narrow-minded or reactionary. This is partly because of the technical skill and variety of subject, but is also a consequence of the stark simplicity of the muir which is the basis of several images, as when the poet picks up a rock to use in demonstration, or makes use of the recurrent image of heaven as 'Badenoch in simmer, wi nae clegs about'.

That image of the muir recurs in 'The Bog' and 'The Wire', two poems of wartime (though written, in the case of the latter at least, in 1954). The image of 'the tracer-bullets splairgin frae a gun' in 'The Muir' forms another link, and it is no coincidence that in all these poems he returns to his wartime experience, which seems to have been a defining moment. That much is evident from Garioch's major prose work, his wartime memoir *Two Men and a Blanket*.<sup>10</sup> Although written not long after he returned from the war, it was not published until 1975 —something he attributed to the fact that it was 'too unexciting, too unheroic'.<sup>11</sup> This is, in fact, the book's charm: there are no daring escapes or adventures, rather the hardship, the difficulties and the comradeship of daily life in the prison camps are described in detail but with easygoing humour. The book was serialised on BBC Radio Scotland, and in an article previewing that broadcast Garioch told his interviewer that his time as a POW was 'my great adventure. It gave me something to talk about for the rest of my life'.<sup>12</sup>

The centrality of this experience explains its recurrence in these poems. Not all critics have been convinced by this; Alexander Scott writes:

In 'The Bog', which appears to belong in the wartime world of the forties, the symbolic swamp of the title extends uneasily under realistic details of air raids, and there is a similar unsuccessful attempt to combine the allegorical and the naturalistic in 'The Wire'. The ballad stanzas of the latter poem are leaden in movement and pedestrian in style, a far cry from the idiomatic liveliness and rhythmical dexterity of the comic verse.<sup>13</sup>

It will become evident that Scott's opinion about 'The Wire' puts him in the minority among critics. One can see his point about 'The Bog' [CPW, p. 47], though it is not by any means a bad poem. It shows characteristic imagination in drawing an analogy

<sup>10</sup> Robert Garioch. *Two Men and a Blanket*. Edinburgh: Southside, 1975.

<sup>11</sup> George Rosie. 'Stalag 8B: the great adventure', p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> George Rosie. 'Stalag 8B: the great adventure', p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> 'Robert Garioch: The Makar and the Mask', p. 14. Scott is kinder about 'The Muir', which he regards as 'the most intellectually ambitious of all extended modern poems in Scots'.

between two seemingly disparate things and viewing them concurrently with each other—a trick employed to some degree in all the poems discussed in this chapter. Cleverly, as well as concentrating on the similarities Garioch also shows the differences, and the peace of the distant muir is contrasted with the menacing atmosphere in the city, where ‘bummlan boomers threaten broken banes’, and where, outside,

Nou the impassioned banshees, in F-moll,<sup>14</sup>  
 screich out wi siren voices, anger-riven,  
 Beethoven's chord of Opus 57,  
 the same that skeiched us in the Usher Hall. [CPW, p. 48]

The poem is appealing in its way, but it is true that, compared to ‘The Wire’, ‘The Bog’ pales into insignificance. It is the one poem of Garioch's where there is recognisable autobiographical experience, and once again it combines masterly observation of simple things with a more philosophical outlook.

The poem begins on familiar territory—‘This day I saw ane endless muir’—which is described in terms which seem innocuous but which give way suddenly to reality:

Gossamers glint in aa the airts,  
 criss-cross about the lang flure-heids  
 of girss and thistles here, and there  
 amang the purpie willow-weeds.

Bog-myrtle scent is in the air  
 heavy wi hinnie-sap and peat  
 whiles mellit like uneasy thochts  
 wi something human, shairn or sweat.

Nou guns gaun aff, and pouter-reik  
 and yappin packs of foetid dugs,  
 and blobs of cramosie, like blebs  
 of bluid squeezed frae vanilla bugs... [CPW, p. 49]

This sudden juxtaposition of the pastoral and the brutal is central to the initial effect of this poem. The onomatopœic description of the ‘yapping packs of foetid dugs’ provokes a sense of unease, which is compounded by the description of the ‘blobs of cramosie’, whose provenance is left to the reader's imagination, but the fact that they are compared to ‘blebs/ of bluid’ suggests that they are not what one would expect from the pastoral idyll. This sense becomes clearer in the following stanzas, where it transpires that

The criss-cross gossamers, the while,  
 twang owre the heather, ticht and real;  
 I ken, houever jimp they seem,  
 that they are spun frae strands of steel. [CPW, p. 49]

It has slowly become obvious that this muir, though described in very Scottish terms, is far from home, and is in fact a depiction of the prison camps known to Garioch when

<sup>14</sup> German musical term meaning F minor.

he was captured during the Second World War. 'The wire' is the term used by Garioch in *Two Men and a Blanket* to describe the outer boundary of the prison camps in Italy and Germany. His description of it here emphasises its invasive properties, how its wires 'twang owre the heather' and how the clashing pieces of metal 'break awkwart the lairick's sang'. The overriding sensation is of discomfort. The central incident in the poem, where a man tries to escape and is killed in the process, is evidently based upon an actual occurrence,<sup>15</sup> described in the book in an astonishingly matter-of-fact way:

In the *Revier*, in Block 4, the Stalag-happy inmates built toy houses with a heap of bricks. This kind of existence got some men down, and they would begin to feel that they could not stand it: but the wire was always there, just the same. One afternoon, a man walked to the wire. Instead of making the usual right-about-turn, he quite deliberately began to climb over. The guards could see him distinctly. He climbed down the other side of the first fence. He climbed the second fence, and began to walk slowly across the field. The guard called upon him to stop, but twice he paid no attention. The guard fired, according to orders, and shot him dead.

*Dreary Story*. The one certain way of escaping from the monotony of the Stalag was to go out on a working party...<sup>16</sup>

This matter-of-fact reportage is typical of Garioch's prose in this book, and suggests that as a prisoner of war he was inured to such happenings; nevertheless, it comes as a shock to the reader. One is tempted to return again to Henryson, and the narrator's matter-of-fact conclusion to the 'Testament of Cresseid':

Beir in your mynd this schort conclusioun  
Of fair Cresseid, as I have said befor.  
Sen scho is deid, I speik of hir no moir.<sup>17</sup>

There is a similar sense of detachment when the incident referred to in the autobiography is described in 'The Wire':

A man trips up; the Wire gaes ding,  
tins clash, the guaird lifts up his heid;  
fu slaw he traverses his gun  
and blatters at him till he's deid.

The dugs loup on him, reivan flesh,  
crunchin the bane as they were wud;  
swith they come and swith are gane,  
syne nocht is left but pools of bluid. [*CPW*, p. 50]

There is an air of unreality about this description (reflecting, perhaps, the unreality of prison camp existence): the phrase 'blatters at him till he's deid' is an arcade-game, even comic-strip, image. Yet for all the effectiveness of this unusual account of prison camp life—which, in Douglas Dunn's phrase, 'comes close the blackline clarity of medieval

<sup>15</sup> if we take Garioch at his word that 'I have never, or hardly ever, added imagined detail for the sake of literary improvement' (*Two Men and a Blanket*, p. 7).

<sup>16</sup> *Two Men and a Blanket*, pp. 121–2.

<sup>17</sup> *Henryson selected by Hugh MacDiarmid*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p. 42.

woodcuts'<sup>18</sup>—it is merely a prelude to the main theme of the poem: the opening sixty lines prepare the metaphor which is sustained for the rest of the piece. Garioch relates the image of the wire, of the threat it represents, and of the reactions it provokes in people, to the human condition, and to different forms of human character and behaviour. This is done in a way which is, on the first reading, almost imperceptible: it is not entirely clear whether the 'muir' of Garioch's description is that particular one in Silesia or the 'muir' of the human condition which is becoming a familiar theme. One can see this ambiguity in the passage which follows the death of the prisoner, 'taigit on a bairb' [*CPW*, p. 51]. In this passage the subject has changes from 'he' to 'they', and what seemed to start out as a description of another escapee has, it seems, turned into a meditation on indecision and indecisive people. The prison camp has become the world itself, a place where people accept the forces which control them and are in no position to do anything about it. As if to underline this, the following stanzas describe the guards in terms which are impassive and entirely non-judgemental: they are 'neither friens nor faes', they just 'cairry out their orders stricht' (i.e. immediately). Their attitude is described by the phrase 'it is jist sae, no wrang nor richt'. That attitude seems to be precisely what Garioch is railing against. He then extends the metaphor of the prison camp as a place where there is some freedom, but merely as part of the imprisonment:

Here some folk wycer nor the lave  
or maybe suiner gien to skar  
tether thirsels wi chains to stakes,  
sae they may gang, but no owre far.  
  
Birlan in wretchedness aroun  
their safe lives' centre, they maun dree  
temptation sair to break their chains  
for aye they ettle to gang free. [*CPW*, p. 52]

Sydney Tremayne, one of the few critics to address the philosophical basis of this poem in any detail, has suggested that this passage shows 'Robert Garioch's tragic vision of the world and society as a prison camp in which the oppressed and the oppressors are victims alike'.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, most of the kinds of people described in the poem are viewed as victims in some way. Even those with some strength of character do not escape, while those who venture into the 'barren streitches of the muir' are consigned to

thole the condition of their life  
and dree the weird as best they may. [*CPW*, p. 52]

The poem ends in a strangely optimistic way: having suggested that all these 'guidlie folk are nae great men' he goes on to praise the minority who are:

<sup>18</sup> Douglas Dunn. 'Cantraips and Trauchles', p. 43.

<sup>19</sup> Sydney Tremayne. 'Robert Garioch' (obituary), p. III.



And aye alane or twae by twae  
they gang unhurt amang the noy  
of thon fell planet, and their een  
lowe wi the licht of inwart joy.

Outwarty they seem at rest,  
binna the glint of hidden fires.  
Their warld shaks, but they bide still  
as nodal points on dirlan wires. [*CPW*, p. 53]

There is still an air of slight unreality about this: the phrase 'thon fell planet' gives an alien distance to what is being described, which is heightened by the way these people behave: they remain still while the world shakes, they seem unaffected by the world around them. The poem concludes by confirming this otherworldliness:

In ither airts, whaur folk are thrang,  
the Wire vibrates, clash gae the tins,  
flures blume frae bluidie marl, dugs  
yowl throu the blatter of the guns.

I saw thon planet slawlie birl;  
I saw it as ane endless muir  
in daylight, and I saw a few  
guid men bide still amang the stour. [*CPW*, p. 53]

It is difficult to quantify the success of this poem. Not by any stretch of the imagination is it 'easy', but there is an almost mediæval nobility, a beauty and strength of feeling behind it which transcends the trickiness of the message, which is, at times, obscured by the complexity of the metaphor. It is certainly not 'leaden in movement and pedestrian in style,' in Alexander Scott's words, though his other assertion, that the poem is 'a far cry from the idiomatic liveliness and rhythmical dexterity of the comic verse' is correct—but that is a consequence of the poem's distance from that verse, and the quality is in no way inferior. Douglas Dunn is closer to the truth when he remarks that

His poem about captivity, 'The Wire', ought to be recognized as a masterpiece; and it is the strength of that poem, its devastating, gaunt, but also muscular bleakness, which suggests that his wartime experiences left Garioch very deeply marked by hardship and horror.<sup>20</sup>

In his analysis of this poem, Sydney Tremayne suggests that 'Freedom is the theme with which Robert Garioch never ceased to wrestle'.<sup>21</sup> It is obvious that by the end of 'The Wire' it is those who are free who have the poet's approval, if only because of the hellish portrayal of the alternative of captivity. Freedom occurs often in Garioch's poems, but it is in these long poems where it becomes utterly central. There is a good case for regarding 'The Bog', 'The Wire' and 'The Muir' as a set, a 'dialectical triad', in

<sup>20</sup> Douglas Dunn. 'Cantraips and Trauchles', p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Sydney Tremayne. 'Robert Garioch' (obituary), p. III.

Robert Calder's phrase,<sup>22</sup> where the central theme of Garioch's poetry is stated in the most heartfelt, poetic and original way. Certainly, the overall view of Garioch's poetry is altered when the longer poems are considered, and it becomes obvious that the shorter, humorous poems only show one, rather limited, side of the poet. That view becomes wider still when it takes into account Garioch's work as a translator.

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Calder, 'The Direction of the Long Poem', *Chapman* 30 (Summer 1981), p. 65.

## CHAPTER IV

### Satirist and Humanist: Garioch the translator

#### POEM

*for translation into Chinese and back again*

He expends an amount of energy  
out of all proportion to what he is paid for it,  
transmitting his hard-won learning  
to those who do not even know it is worthless. [CPW, p. 186]

This brief poem is Robert Garioch's wry commentary on the translator's art. Its subtitle is a perfect and nicely loaded metaphor for the message of the poem, that the translator has to work even harder for very little extra appreciation. Garioch was well placed to comment, since a surprisingly large proportion of his published work consists of translations into Scots—from such wide-ranging sources as Guillaume Apollinaire, Lars Gustafsson, Göran Sonnevi, Tomas Tranströmer, Henri Michaux, Vittorio Sereni and Pindar—as well as from the Anglo-Saxon of 'The Traveller'. Evidently the act of translation was one that appealed to Garioch, as Sydney Goodsir Smith's introduction to the *Selected Poems* suggests:

Garioch believes with Yeats, and I think with Ezra Pound also, that when a poet is not in the mood for writing it is as well to keep his hand in, his lamp full of oil, his engine tuned or whatever, by exercising his craft on translations, so that when the Muse does choose to visit her creature he will be in good fettle to entertain her. Garioch is a masterly translator and a very personal one... so that no matter who the author of the original was, or in what language he wrote, the translation always comes out pure Garioch.<sup>1</sup>

These translations from eclectic foreign writers remind us that Garioch's horizons as a writer were cosmopolitan, even if their provenance was almost accidental:

I have become interested in Apollinaire, in my usual haphazard manner... I really did pay attention to this extraordinary poet, who was being 1968ish about the year I was born.<sup>2</sup>

Garioch translated five poems by Apollinaire, and they typify his approach to translation: a loyalty to the spirit of the original coupled with a keenness to exploit the distinctiveness of Scots. 'Ferlie of the Weir', a translation of 'Merveille de la Guerre' from *Calligrammes*, exemplifies this, though it also highlights certain aspects of the original poem—occasional very long lines, odd vocabulary—which limit the translator's freedom. Indeed, Garioch's rendering of

Si je pouvais supposer que toutes ces choses dans lesquelles je suis partout  
Pouvaient m'occuper aussi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to Robert Garioch. *Selected Poems*. Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1966, p. 8. Further references to this book are abbreviated to *SP* and embedded in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Sydney Tremayne, 29 September 1968. [*GM*, p. 4]

<sup>3</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire. *Calligrammes*, trans. by Anne Hyde Greet. Los Angeles: University of

preserves the stress but is less unwieldy:

Gin I cuid jalouse that aa thae things in whilk I am aawhair  
Micht inhabit me alsweill. [*CPW*, p. 116].

'A Phantom of Haar' (from Apollinaire's 'Un Fantôme de Nuées') is freer in its enterprising use of Scots vocabulary, though this does remove some of the pretence and mystery from the language:

Ces gens qui font des tours en plein air  
Commencent à être rares à Paris [*Calligrammes*, p. 80]

becomes

Thir folk that dae their turns outside  
Are gettin kinna scarce in Paris. [*CPW*, p. 117]

Though the translations from Apollinaire are few in number, they share with Garioch's two major works of translation a sense of familiarity with the territory: in this case with a wartime setting. The two other major works of translation frame his career: the early translations of two plays, *George Buchanan's Jephthah and The Baptist, translatit in Scots*,<sup>4</sup> which was the first book by Garioch to appear in print, and the translations of the Romanesco sonnets of Guiseppe Belli, on which he was working at the time of his death (some had been published in periodicals or in books already, and the whole set of 120 is contained in the *Complete Poetical Works*). Both were labours of love, yet they could not be more different: the Buchanan plays are moralistic, sombre and intellectual, while the Belli sonnets are raucous, hilarious, anti-clerical, often obscene and full of life. Both Buchanan and Belli are figures often seen as rather peripheral to the traditions of their homelands. Each offered Garioch the chance to produce work of startling originality—not the easiest of tasks for the translator—and they show the two opposing sides of Garioch's personality: the keen city-dweller and the serious-minded Scots thinker.

It may seem redundant to search for a reason for Garioch's decision to translate these works into Scots, Garioch's natural language of expression, but it is interesting to look at the question in the light of John Corbett's recent book about translation into Scots, where he suggests that

Not all Lallans translators... have been thirled to the contemporary. MacDiarmid's purpose may have been to drag Scots poetry kicking and screaming into the twentieth century and therefore to focus on the modern; however, those who picked up his baton very quickly began to turn their attention not only to their contemporaries but to the literatures of past times and foreign lands... Partly, too, the modern makars wished to draw attention to their internationalism by associating themselves

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California Press Berkeley, 1980, p. 258.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Garioch. *George Buchanan's Jephthah and The Baptist translatit in Scots*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1959. Hereafter *Jephthah and The Baptist*.

with the recognised canon of world literature... the Lallans poets wished to indicate their intellectual and emotional roots by drawing on a wide range of writers with whom they felt empathy and shared concerns. Moreover, as we have seen demonstrated again and again, the exploration of foreign literature has been seen as a challenge to Scots and as a way for Scottish translators to extend their poetic voices experimenting with registers which Scots had lost but which were long-established elsewhere.<sup>5</sup>

Elsewhere in the book Corbett aligns the Belli translations to the political agenda of the Scottish Renaissance and suggests that they help Garioch to 'recapture the hard-edged satirical voice which had become softened in the post-Burnsian slide into sentimentality'.<sup>6</sup> Though Corbett caricatures MacDiarmid as being 'thirled to the modern', it should not be forgotten that he too had a strong affinity with the Scots writers of the past, and indeed sent Garioch this keen letter following the publication of *Jephthah and the Baptist*:

Many thanks for the inscribed copy of your Jephtha [sic] and The Baptist... I'm restarting my *Voice of Scotland* and will review your book there. I was disgusted to know that O & B made you pay for its publication and do hope they exert themselves to sell it...

I agree with you—the thing was well worth doing—and you seem to me to have made a good job of it.<sup>7</sup>

Grieve hints here at the trouble Garioch had publishing the plays—'my favourite among my books', as he puts it in an interview cited in Bill Findlay's article which deals with Garioch's fondness for the work.<sup>8</sup> So why did he have such an affinity with it? Although, as Findlay points out, there are numerous occasions in Garioch's letters and interviews where he calls it 'my favourite work', tantalisingly he never explains why. Findlay's answer to the question is a complicated one. I have already cited the fact that Garioch regarded himself as a craftsman, and Findlay acknowledges that, on one level, 'the pride he felt in the quality of the translations and in the mastery he achieved of an effective literary Scots' are part of the appeal. However, he also makes clear that there are other, more complicated, potential reasons for Garioch's liking for this work, and cites the influence of George Elder Davie's book *The Democratic Intellect* on the translations.<sup>9</sup>

The most intriguing feature of the Buchanan book is its preface. This, too, is written in Scots: indeed, there is not an English word in the entire volume, down to the 'copyright' citation on the title page. This is a clue to some of Garioch's reasons for pro-

<sup>5</sup> John Corbett. *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation: A History of Literary Translation into Scots*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999, pp. 140–1.

<sup>6</sup> John Corbett. *Written in the Language of the Scottish Nation*, p. 143.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Christopher Grieve, 10 August 1960. NLS, MS26561, fol. 146.

<sup>8</sup> Bill Findlay. 'Robert Garioch's *Jephthah and The Baptist*: Why he considered it "my favourite work",' *SLJ* vol. 25 no. 2 (November 1998), p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> George Elder Davie. *The Democratic Intellect*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1961.

ducing the work. In the preface Garioch contextualises the importance of Buchanan's position in Scottish literature:

Thae Scottish Latinists, sae lang as they were able, keepit alive the memory o Scots as ane o the classic tongues, and makars wha had sat in their schules, and in the Humanity class rooms, were aye ettlin to translate in Scots the pairts o Virgil left untranslatit by Gavin Douglas. Sae Fergusson, afore he dee'd, projeckit a version o baith the Eclogues and the Georgics and Alexander Geddes brocht out a specimen translation o the first Eclogue, juist to schaw whit the auld leid cud dae. Nou, to produce the samyn strecht line frae the point whaur it was broken-aff, we micht as weill try hou Buchanan's tragedies will soun in Scots. I canna say that they seem aathegither richt in English translations: the unco-dowie logic o the Hebrew Jephthah juist doesna maik wi English conventions, and the Baptist's thrawn Jewish threipin o ill-faur'd sooth seems mair naiteral whan he flytes in Scots.<sup>10</sup>

Garioch's intention—apart from the stylistic element of producing an attractive piece of work, which will become obvious later—seems to be to revitalise the reputation of an important but now largely forgotten figure, and the seriousness of this intention is underlined by the rigid uniformity of the Scots into which Garioch translates the work. As Bill Findlay acknowledges, this is the most obvious area of Davie's influence, since later in the preface he acknowledges 'wi special gratitude my debt to Dr George Davie... wha first, langsyne, put thochts o George Buchanan intill my heid, and wha socht-out the feck o the maitter set furth in this preface'.<sup>11</sup> Findlay goes on to quote a 1978 letter of Garioch's where he says that 'the introduction to Jephthah etc is in large part put into Scots from a letter I had from George Davie, which was so informative and so well-expressed that it only needed a straightforward translation to go into that rigorously Scots book'. However, Garioch does not tell the whole story in this letter, since it would appear that he asked Davie specifically to write a preface; at least, a letter from Davie which discusses the fact that the plays were finally to be published includes the comment 'I'll be delighted to write a short introduction',<sup>12</sup> though when I asked Davie whether the preface was based on his own work, he would only reply 'I think it was a little'.<sup>13</sup> The compliment is returned in a footnote to the introduction of *The Democratic Intellect*, where Davie suggests that

Read in the pseudo-Shakespearian English of routine Victorian translations, these plays do indeed sound 'pedantic and grim', whereas in the recent lively version in Scots (Oliver & Boyd, 1960) [sic: the date of publication was 1959], we find the starkness of moral conflict presented with grim humour.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Jephthah and the Baptist*, pp. 5–6.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Findlay, 'Robert Garioch's *Jephthah and the Baptist*', p. 46. Findlay quotes from p. 7 of the introduction.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from George Elder Davie, 28 February 1957. NLS, MS26567, fol. 67.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with George Davie, 16 May 2000.

<sup>14</sup> George Davie. *The Democratic Intellect*, p. xiii (footnote).

The revitalisation of Buchanan was germane to Davie's agenda in *The Democratic Intellect*, but it was not the only spur behind Garioch's translations, since Garioch was also concerned with the political implications of his use of Scots. This is clear from the first paragraph of the Preface:

A memorial winnock in Aberdeen University, burst, I'm tellt, wi a boomb, used to schaw George Buchanan groupit thegither wi Arthur Johnston, Thomas Ruddiman and Dr Melvin: the twa former being the poets, the twa latter the scholars wha keepit alive the tradition o interpreting them. Nou the important thing here is that baith in Ruddiman (d. 1757) and in Melvin (d. 1855) the study o Buchanan, side-for-side wi Horace and Virgil as a classical Latin writer was combined wi thochts o pruv'in what Scots can dae, baith in itsel and as a medium for classical wark. Sae, in the decade eftir the Union, Ruddiman brocht out his editions o Buchanan and o Gavin Douglas' *Aeneid*, wi the ob-ject o schawin that a Scot cud be a great makar and that a classic micht be written in Scots.<sup>15</sup>

Findlay's examination of the circumstances of Garioch's connection with Davie in this context is well-researched and informative, and only needs a little amplification. He surmises that, although the publication of *Jephthah and the Baptist* (1959) and *The Democratic Intellect* (1961) overlap, they feed into each other because Garioch and Davie seemed to have discussed the issues involved many times before, and he believes that 'we can validly draw on [*The Democratic Intellect*] in attempting to elucidate the ideas and ideals behind Garioch's decision to translate Buchanan's plays'.<sup>16</sup> An examination of some of Garioch's letters proves this assumption to be correct: as far back as 1952, Davie's letters to Garioch (when Davie was lecturing at Queen's University, Belfast) speak of the intellectual climate in 19th century Edinburgh—one of the major concerns of Davie's book—and a letter of 1953 (fol. 16) mentions Buchanan specifically.<sup>17</sup> It is also obvious that Davie had seen the early drafts of the plays, since a letter of 1956 exclaims

The Baptist is even more magnificent than the Jephtha; " your translations. Once again, the chorus are wonderful [sic]. You've done a terrific job there. Nothing is deader than the Senecan chorus, at least in the estimation of the classicists from the last century, and it's incredible how very alive you bring them.<sup>18</sup>

However, an examination of Davie's correspondence with Garioch, combined with an examination of Garioch's other contemporary correspondence, reveals quite a different reason for Garioch's emotional attachment to the work, which is the phenomenal effort he put into publishing it. A good deal of what remains of Garioch's correspondence from the late 1950s concerns itself with this subject. It would seem that even at this stage Garioch was confident of the quality of his work, since he submitted drafts of the plays several times to different departments of the BBC, as is made clear from the

<sup>15</sup> *Jephthah and the Baptist*, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Findlay. 'Robert Garioch's *Jephthah and the Baptist*', p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> This correspondence is contained in NLS, MS26567.

<sup>18</sup> Letter from George Davie of 7 June 1956. NLS, MS26567, fol. 41.

increasingly exasperated replies from BBC staff: Mrs Barbara Bray in London attempted to pass the work onto BBC Scotland,<sup>19</sup> but received it back after, one surmises, the Glasgow office rejected it:

Perhaps the best thing, now, would be for you to let us see the script again down here, though I must say that I think you rate an English audience's power to understand Scots dialect rather higher than I do!<sup>20</sup>

An earlier letter from BBC Scotland shows that they were less than keen, and implies a certain stubbornness on Garioch's part in refusing to take no for an answer:

I find that this play has already been considered and regretfully rejected by our Play Reading Panel. I do not, therefore, feel that there is much point in re-opening the case. As you will know from previous correspondence, the vigorous quality of the Scots was appreciated by our Panel, but it was felt then—and I think that feeling is still valid—that much of the play would be above the heads of our audience.<sup>21</sup>

Undaunted, Garioch evidently then set about trying to find a publisher. Here too the denseness of the Scots (and, one suspects, the obscurity of the subject matter) seemed to work against the project, but it seems also to have fallen victim to indecision and misunderstanding on the part of several Edinburgh publishers. Initially Edinburgh University Press were extremely keen: A.R. Turnbull's initial acceptance read

At this stage I can at least express great interest in the work and intend to pursue the matter very shortly. Dr Davie has spoken to me about the Saltire Society as likely publishers... without being superior or critical I can tell you that the Saltire does not command the quality of production available to our Press. If we published we would publish very handsomely indeed, while keeping the price down to a moderate figure.<sup>22</sup>

It soon becomes clear, however, that things were not as they should have been. Garioch's appointment of Robin Lorimer as his agent not long after this would suggest that matters had gone out of his depth,<sup>23</sup> and by the end of the year a letter from Lorimer hints at difficulties at EUP and at Oliver & Boyd, who were also involved by this stage<sup>24</sup>—this is perhaps not entirely surprising, since the introduction to the book contains an acknowledgement to 'Maister R.L.C. Lorimer o Oliver & Boyd and Maister M. Macdonald for their specialised wark as Editor and Prenter o this buke in Scots'.<sup>25</sup> It is not entirely clear what was going on, although several letters from George Elder Davie indicate that EUP's initial enthusiasm soon dimmed. A letter from the end

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Barbara Bray, 12 April 1956. NLS, MS26561, fol. 103.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Barbara Bray, 10 October 1956. NLS, MS26561, fol. 114.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Finlay J. Macdonald, 29 September 1956. NLS, MS26561, fol. 110.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from A.R. Turnbull, 21 June 1956. NLS, MS26561, fol. 106.

<sup>23</sup> Lorimer sent a letter on 29 August 1956 agreeing to become Garioch's agent. NLS, MS26561, fol. 109.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Robin Lorimer, 27 December 1956. NLS, MS26561, fol. 116.

<sup>25</sup> *Jephthah and the Baptist*, p. 7.



of June 1956 talks conspiratorially of 'an authoritative account of the Committee meeting' where the matter was discussed, and later Davie says that 'Now [A.R.] Turnbull tells me that, at the moment, there is little hope of this [the publication of the work as a scholarly text], and it is clear enough that the Committee, in spite of the Saltire recommendations, regarded 'the Doric' as a medium quite below the notice of the E.U. Press'.<sup>26</sup> Davie concludes by offering to submit his own reader's report to the Committee. The work was eventually published by Oliver & Boyd in 1959 but only (if MacDiarmid is to be believed, and there is no reason to doubt him, since he and Garioch seem to have been on good terms at this stage) at Garioch's own expense. It seems that the path to publication would have been smoothed considerably had the plays been performed at the Edinburgh Festival. George Davie and Archie Turnbull both claimed when talking to me to have spoken to Duncan Macrae, the actor, in an attempt to make this happen but, as Turnbull describes, it came to nothing:

I sent the manuscripts to Duncan Macrae, who was then the leading actor in Scotland, and he was very very enthusiastic; he offered to put it on at the Edinburgh Festival and produce it free of charge and act in it himself, provided I could get a Director to support it, but he just couldn't see that it was as good as the *Thrie Estaitis*... I would have taken it on at that particular stage if Duncan Macrae had said 'yes, I'll put it on'...<sup>27</sup>

Small wonder that Garioch was moved to talk about 'the unwanted *Jephthah*. Jehovah knows I have plenty of copies of that' elsewhere in the letter quoted by Findlay.<sup>28</sup> In fact, comparing *Jephthah* with the original and with the work of other translators, Garioch's pride in his work is understandable. However relevant the ideological reasoning behind their existence, it was a matter of some bravery to translate the work of such an unfashionable figure, especially two plays which are rather heavy-going in their emphasis on death and moral dilemmas. It was also, however, an entirely understandable thing to do for someone with a knowledge of Buchanan's works. I.D. McFarlane, in his biography of Buchanan, describes the scale of the contemporary popularity of the *Jephthes* as 'little short of phenomenal',<sup>29</sup> but, more relevantly, suggests that

what is more extraordinary is the widespread vogue for translating the *Jephthes* into the vernacular. The movement starts in France, where it is associated with the development of Huguenot propaganda... Curiously, it is in Britain that translations of the *Jephthes* are late to appear; apart from Tait's version which came out in 1750 at Edinburgh, we have to wait until the nineteenth century for translators to turn their attention to the play... more recently Scotsmen have tried to renew interest in the text.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Letter from George Davie, 28 June 1956. NLS, MS26567, fol. 53.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Archie Turnbull, 24 Warriston Crescent, Edinburgh, 14 August 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Letter to David Black, 26 November 1969. [GM p. 43]

<sup>29</sup> I.D. McFarlane. *Buchanan*, p. 201. McFarlane compares the success unfavourably with that of the *Baptistes*, which he describes as 'much more overtly partisan'. Similarly, Garioch's translation of the *Jephthes* seems the more successful of the two.

<sup>30</sup> I.D. McFarlane. *Buchanan*, pp. 202-4.

This last comment is expanded in a footnote, where McFarlane lists three translations, those of Alexander Gibb (1870), A. Gordon Mitchell (1903) and 'A. Sutherland (1959)'—this erroneous citation is the only mention of Garioch's work. It is, however, very interesting that the three translations are listed together, partly because the fact that one is Scots and two are in English is ignored, but also because Garioch used these two translations—or, more specifically, seemed to react against them—in the preparation of his own work. In the Preface Garioch mentions Mitchell's translation and that of Archibald Brown of Legerwood (1906) and says that 'the last twa hae been o muckle help to me in this wark...' and does not acknowledge Gibb's translation at all.<sup>31</sup> But the fact that Garioch transcribed Gibb's translations of both plays into one of his notebooks in 1955 would suggest that he was at least aware of it—though it was only one of many works which received this treatment.<sup>32</sup>

It is when Garioch's plays are juxtaposed with the heavy-handed Victorian treatment of the translations by Gibb and Brown that the extent of Garioch's skill becomes clear. Compare, for example, the opening of Scene 1, where Jephthah's wife Storge makes clear her feelings of foreboding:

STORGE.

Alas! my heart with recent terror throbs,  
My mind is horror-struck, my trembling voice  
Cleaves to my very jaws, nor do my lips  
Afford a pervious pathway to my words;  
me wretched thus nocturnal visions scare,  
And direful dreams disturb my broken rest,  
And burn my anxious breast with heavy cares.<sup>33</sup> [Gibb]

STO. Ah me! my heart yet trembles in dismay,  
My mind is filled with horror, and my voice  
Obstructed labours for mere utterance,  
And scarce my lips can give to airy words  
Their evanescent form—so full of dread  
The visions of the night have been to me,  
And fearful dreams have roused in me a sad  
And wakeful trouble, and my anxious heart  
Beats wearily beneath a weight of care.<sup>34</sup> [Brown]

STORGE

Aye me! my hairt is flichtin yet wi the fricht,

<sup>31</sup> *Jephthah and the Baptist*, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> The two notebooks of NLS, MSS26575–6 contain this translation, as well as extracts from other works as varied as Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*.

<sup>33</sup> George Buchanan. *The Jephtha and Baptist*, trans. by Alexander Gibb. Edinburgh: J. Moodie Miller, 1870, p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> George Buchanan. *The Sacred Dramas of George Buchanan Translated into English Verse*, trans. by Archibald Brown. Edinburgh: James Thin, 1906, p. 7.

my mind is horrified, my voice halts,  
 the words can hardly win out frae my lips:  
 I hae been visited nichtlang by visions,  
 terribly swevins break my sleep,  
 and brenn my breist wi bitter cares.<sup>35</sup> [Garioch]

Presented this way the most obvious difference between the three versions is the economy of Garioch's one—Brown takes nine lines to say what Garioch says in six. While 'my voice halts' may lack the imagination of 'my trembling voice/ Cleaves to my very jaws', its simplicity is more appropriate to the sombre atmosphere which Storge's words suggest. Brown's rendering of the following line—'And scarce my lips can give to airy words/ Their evanescent form'—seems especially ill-chosen. Comparing Garioch's Scots with the original Latin suggests that, of the three translators, Garioch comes closest to the spirit and, crucially, the structure of the original:

Eheu recenti corda palpitant metu,  
 Mens horret, hæret vox in ipsis faucibus,  
 Nec ora verbis peruium præbent iter:  
 Nocturna sic me visa miseram territant,  
 Et dira turbant inquietam insomnia,  
 Grauibisque curis pectus vrunt anxium.<sup>36</sup>

The contrast between the two earlier translations and the corresponding rightness of Garioch's one is even more pronounced at the end of the play, where the fate of Iphis, Jephthah's sacrificed daughter, is described. The sparseness of Garioch's rendering of this speech is in marked contrast to the melodramatic approach of Gibb and Brown:

STORGE.

Ah, miserable me! hath every hope  
 Of safety perish'd? Speak.

MESSENGER

It was indeed  
 An adverse thing, but not entirely ill. [Gibb p.103]

STO. O breaking heart! is then the last dim ray  
 Of hope extinct and lost? Tell forth thy tale.  
 MESS. For a thing so piteous, there might have been  
 A still more piteous ending. [Brown p.83]

STORGE

Oh wae is me, is my last hope wede awa?  
 Tell me.

MESSENGER

What has taen place, terrible in itsel,  
 nicht hae been even waur. [Garioch p.50]

Not only is the contrast between these renderings clear, once again only Garioch's preserves the shape of the original, where Storge asks

<sup>35</sup> *Jephthah and the Baptist*, p. 13. Subsequent references to all the translations are embedded in the text.

<sup>36</sup> George Buchanan. *Iepthes Siue Votum Tragædia*. Paris: Morelium, 1554, pp. 3-4.

Heu misera, an omnis spes salutis occidit?  
Effare. [*Jephthes*, p. 49]

However, the contrast is most notable at the dramatic climax of the piece in Scene XIV, just before the end, where Iphis' death is described (although Buchanan delicately avoids any description of the moment of death: he simply shows Iphis' dignity beforehand and the crowd's reaction). Garioch's description is dignified and to the point:

MESSENGER

Hear ye then, in few words, hou it aa happened.  
Whan the virgin stude, victim forenenst the altar,  
her pale maiden cheeks blushed reid frae modesty,  
unyaisd wi staundin in sicht o yon crowd o men:  
like Indian ivory stained wi reid dye,  
or roses scattered amang snaw-white lilies. [Garioch p.50]

It is interesting to see the way the three translators cope with Buchanan's slightly wordy description of Iphis' appearance, which seems to contradict the messenger's promise of brevity. Garioch, again, retains a simplicity notably absent from Brown's attempt:

MES. Hear then in brief how passed the closing scene.—  
When at the altar steps the maiden stood,  
As the appointed victim now displayed—  
Unwont to meet the gaze of men, who there  
Gazed on her crowding—maiden modesty  
O'er her wan cheeks—alas, how pale and wan!—  
Suffused a glowing crimson; as if one  
Should stain the purest ivory of Ind  
With dye of Tyrian shell, or intermix  
With the red rose the lilies white as snow. [Brown p.84]

It is perhaps unfair to be too harsh on Brown's idiomatic but now woefully outdated choice of words, but one is struck by the extent to which Garioch matches his diction and tone to the spirit of the original. Graham Tulloch, in his comparison of Garioch's work with the translations of Mitchell and Brown, emphasises his fidelity to the *language* of the original:

Garioch's translation of Buchanan's 'captatores alius captans' as 'Anither hunts the legacy-hunters' derives directly from the original since the phrase has entirely disappeared from both the other versions.<sup>37</sup>

Tulloch makes the point that Garioch could have been tempted to produce a very free translation, but 'rather than evade problems' with this approach 'he allowed reasonable adherence to the original to force him to search for appropriate Scots diction'.

<sup>37</sup> Graham Tulloch. 'Robert Garioch's Translation of George Buchanan's *Jephthah* and *The Baptist*', in *Frae Ither Tongues: Essays on Modern Translations in Scots*, ed. Bill Findlay. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001 (forthcoming). I am grateful to Professor Tulloch for providing me with an ms copy of his essay.

This fidelity to the original calls on a great deal of technical skill, the extra effort of a craftsman which will be noticed by a few, if any, readers. This trait is also evident in Garioch's Scots versions of the Romanesco sonnets of Guiseppe Belli, but while in the Buchanan plays closeness to the original is merely a virtuosic flourish, in the Belli sonnets it becomes a necessity. Though Garioch was working on these at the time of his death (Callum Macdonald having decided to publish a book of two hundred of them), he was interested in Belli long before: Robin Fulton dates 'Judgment Day' [*CPW*, p.229] at February 1959, 'Sax Roman Sonnets (translated frae Belli)' have pride of place at the start of the *Selected Poems* of 1966 immediately after 'Embroid to the Ploy' [*SP*, pp. 19–22], and there is a larger quantity in the *Collected Poems*. Indeed, the writer of Garioch's obituary notice in *The Times* suggests, not without some justification, that it was his interest in Belli that inspired his own Edinburgh Sonnets:

[in London] he began translating into Scots the satirical sonnets of the Italian *romanesco* poet Belli, and this led on to his original, genially witty Edinburgh sonnets, with which he attained a wide reputation as the leading comic poet of his time in Scotland.<sup>38</sup>

Both men would have felt slightly short-changed to be characterised as 'comic' poets, since for both writers comedy, though an end in itself, was also a vehicle for railing against hypocrisy and corruption. The point is well made that Belli was a long-term presence in Garioch's thinking, but it is true that in the last few years of his life the bulk of his memorable work consisted of the Belli translations; what original work there is is forgettable. A letter of 1977 shows that by this stage of his career he was in need of a new focus:

it rather looks as if my original poetry is exhausted; well, that does happen, I think, and even translation seems to need unwilling effort, so the whole thing may as well have a rest.<sup>39</sup>

George Davie, who remained in close contact with Garioch until his death, confirmed to me the impression that he lost the desire to write original poetry in his latter years.<sup>40</sup> It is astonishing, then, that the muse should have returned in such spectacular fashion, such that Sydney Tremayne commented to Garioch not long before his death that

I'm glad the Belli translations are to be published in quantity. They will be such a contribution to Scottish literature that they will continue to draw attention to your original poetry. You have made them your own, anyway.<sup>41</sup>

It is easy to see the appeal of the sonnets of Belli to Garioch, since Belli was a similar writer in many respects: Norman MacCaig's review of the *Complete Poetical Works* dwells on the significance of the sonnets at some length (and, indeed, much of it is

<sup>38</sup> *The Times*, 2 May 1981, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup> Letter to 'a friend', 16 April 1977. *GM* p. 71.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with George Davie, 16 May 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from Sydney Tremayne, 5 April 1981. NLS, MS26571, fol. 103.

translated into Italian in the body of Damiano Abeni's article, with which I will deal later). MacCaig describes the Belli translations as 'an important part of Garioch's work', then goes on to explain that

Belli wrote in Romanesco, a dialect of Italian spoken in Rome, as Garioch wrote in a dialect of Scots solidly, but far from absolutely, based on Edinburgh speech—and good for Donald Carne-Ross that he directed Garioch's attention to that remarkable poet, for they were very much alike in their temperaments and in their attitudes to the society they lived in. Belli could, I believe, be more bawdy than Garioch (who intended to tackle some of the bawdy sonnets all the same) and more savage. For Garioch, satirist as he was, had too much affection for people to be really ruthless. He was, indeed, a man without malice, never mind hate. His weapon was mockery; real anger does come in, but the 'reductive idiom' is his usual weapon, and it works fine.

I mustn't give the impression that Garioch and Belli were just a pair of comics. They had a sharp eye for the more unpleasant foibles of their friends and neighbours as well as a detestation of those with the pennies and the power; and love, poverty, death, their frequent subjects, aren't to be joked about.<sup>42</sup>

Of course, the attributes MacCaig describes apply to Garioch's writing in general, and it is probably this unity of voice which makes the translations so successful. Taken on its own, a sonnet such as 'The Condiment of Paradise' seems unmistakably Garioch:

Eftir Gode had creatit in a week  
aa kinna orra things, baith nice and nasty,  
in or near Paradise, he made a cleek,  
and on thon cleek hingit a ham, gey tasty.

And said, 'Thon wife, that niver wes in haste tae  
faisten the horns on a man, sall stick  
her knife intilt and hae a graund fiesta  
wi breid of hevin, hailmeal, our ain bake.'

Jist walin them at random, we can say  
Eve dee'd, and Leah dee'd, and Abigail  
and aa the lave, doun til the present day.

Ilkane of them, knife in her haund, wad fail  
to cut a whang, and nane of them cuid hae.  
Sax thoosan years, and still thon ham is haill. [CPW, p. 235]

Garioch shows the combination of jocular freedom with yet fidelity to the sonnet form that is familiar from the 'Edinburgh Sonnets': the rhyme on *haste tae/fiesta* is a good example of this, enhanced by the slightly unusual phrase 'a graund fiesta'. There are several examples of Garioch's characteristic exploitation of the mock-heroic qualities of Scots: the image of God creating 'aa kinna orra things', God talking about 'Thon wife', and so on. The moral of the poem—that no wife has ever given her husband freedom—is not voiced explicitly; instead it is hinted at very obviously in the wonderful last line, 'Sax thoosan years, and still thon ham is haill'.

<sup>42</sup> Norman MacCaig, 'Making Mock', *TLS*, 18 November 1983, p. 1272.

Even with no reference to the original Romanesco, this is masterful stuff: the writing is accomplished with such ease that it stands as poetry in its own right, and seems perfectly at home within Garioch's style. However, such an approach is also rather misleading, since in order to appreciate just how skilful Garioch's translation is we need to make some reference to the original. And we should not underestimate the difficulties he would have faced, even ignoring the fact that Garioch, with only rudimentary knowledge of Italian, had to rely on cribs supplied by Antonia Stott. Don Nicol lists some of the other difficulties:

Belli's language defies translation; his argot cannot be transported across linguistic boundaries without losing a greater part of its essence, its vitality, its gutsy Roman brusqueness. The challenge then is to transpose Belli into an appropriate idiom.<sup>43</sup>

That idiom, obviously, was Edinburgh Scots, and Nicol is not alone in arguing that Garioch's sonnets are considerably more successful than those of Anthony Burgess.<sup>44</sup> One begins to realise the extent of Garioch's skill in a sonnet such as 'The Rosary at Hame', where Garioch retains about half of Belli's vocabulary:

*Avemmaria... git crackin... grazia prena...*  
 Lena, will ye git oan wi'd?... *ddominu steco...*  
*uf!... bbenedetta tu mujjeri... Lena!...*  
*e bbenedetto... Answer me? Jist an echo?...*

*frutto sventr'e ttu Jeso. San... In the name a!...*  
*ta Maria madre Dei... I'll wring yer neck... o-*  
*ra pre nobbi... an aipple? Naw, I haena,*  
*wait till yer supper. Lord! whit's thon thing?... pecca-*

*tori... whaur's aa thon mending frae? I ken-na.*  
*Come on: whaur had I got tae?... Oh, I mind:*  
*nunche tinora morti nostri ammene.*

*Grolia padre... And nou? bitch! whit d'ye say?*  
*The rosary is owre: I ken that fine;*  
*we'll hae to feenish it anither day. [CPW, p. 237]*

Don Nicol quotes the first four lines of Belli's original:

*Avemmaria... lavora... grazia prena...*  
*Nena, voi lavora?... ddominu steco...*  
*Uf!... benedetta to mujjeri... Nena!...*  
*e bbenedetto... vva cche tte secco?*<sup>45</sup>

It will be seen that Garioch has had to use a great deal of skill and imagination to make this sonnet work, and he does it superbly. The diction of the Scots here matches per-

<sup>43</sup> Don W. Nicol. 'Belli up to date: Scots and English sonnet translations by Robert Garioch and Anthony Burgess', *Chapman* 39 (Autumn 1984), p. 36.

<sup>44</sup> Burgess translated 71 of the sonnets in his book *ABBA ABBA*. London: Faber & Faber, 1977.

<sup>45</sup> Don Nicol. 'Belli up to date', p. 35.

fectly the impatience of the mother, and he exploits the juxtaposition of the Latin prayer with such unprayerful sentiments as 'bitch! whit d'ye say?' to produce a poem which evokes the chaos which seems to be a constant feature of Belli's Rome.

The retention of the Latin prayer (and Belli's orthography) in that poem are extreme examples of Garioch's fidelity to the original, but that trait is constant throughout the set. This has been recognised by Damiano Abeni, who points out, in a paper given at a 1984 Belli conference in Rome, that what marks out Garioch's sonnets is 'la costante corrispondenza degli schemi delle rime' [the constant correspondence of the rhyme schemes], and suggests that with only 'rare e parziali eccezioni' [rare and partial exceptions] Garioch always maintains the exact rhyme scheme used by Belli.<sup>46</sup> This is no mean achievement, and it says a great deal about Garioch's skill, not to mention his attention to detail and his craftsmanship. The sequence of correspondence between Garioch and Dr Antonia Stott, who supplied Garioch with English cribs of the Belli sonnets, shows that this policy was deliberate:

I don't see much point in translating sonnets without trying to rhyme them according to the original scheme (like Harold Norse) or by altering the sense (like Anthony Burgess).<sup>47</sup>

Abeni goes on to suggest that 'Judgment Day', one of the most appealing of the sonnets, shows many of the problems encountered by the translator from Romanesco:

Fowre muckle angels wi their trumpets, stalkin  
til the fowre airts, sall aipen the inspection;  
they'll gie a blaw, and bawl, ilk to his section,  
in their huge voices: 'Come, aa yese, be wauken'.

Syne sall crawl furth a ragment, a haill cleckin  
of skeletons yerkt out fir resurrection  
to tak again their ain human complexion,  
like choukies gaitheran roun a hen that's clockan.

And thon hen sall be Gode the blissit Faither;  
he'll pairt the indwellars of mirk and licht,  
tane doun the cellar, to the ruiff the tither.

Last sall come angels, swarms of them, in flicht,  
and, like us gaeen to bed without a swither,  
they will blaw out the caunnles, and guid-nicht. [CPW, p. 229]

Abeni examines in some detail the differences and similarities between Belli's original and Garioch's translation, reserving particular praise for the way in which lines 7 and 8 of this poem reflect the original 'pe ripijà figura de perzone,/ come purcini attorno de la biocca'. The only point that requires amplification is the observation that

<sup>46</sup> Damiano Abeni. 'Robert Garioch: G.G. Belli sulla scia di Fergusson e Burns', in *G.G. Belli: Romano, Italiano e Europeo*. Rome: Bonacci Editore, 1985, pp. 227-8.

<sup>47</sup> Letter to Antonia Stott, 6 July 1979. [GM p. 157]



Garioch fornisce una ben equilibrata traduzione dei versi conclusivi, mantenendosi a livello della seconda quartina per naturalezza e godibilità del testo ma discostandosi colpevolmente da uno dei punti chiave dell'originale, la divisione delle «perzone» in «du' parte, bianca, e nera» [p. 231]

In other words, he maintains a balanced translation to the end of the poem but 'distances himself guiltily' from one of the points of the original, the division of the people into blacks and whites. In fact, the original version of the poem, which appeared in the *Selected Poems*, has as its tenth line 'wha'll wale them out, the darkie frae the lichtie' [*SP*, p. 22], but Garioch makes clear in a later letter to Antonia Stott that 'I never was happy about the darkie and the lichtie, quite apart from being scared of the Race Relations Act'.<sup>48</sup> Aside from Abeni's analysis, we may also remark upon the ease in which Garioch's Scots copes with the rapid change in tone, which occurs between the octet and the sestet, from the apocalyptic opening 'Come, aa yese, be wauken' to the gentle conclusion, 'they will blaw out the caunnles, and guid-nicht'. This comfort is eased by the image of God the father as a hen, which feeds in with ease to the tradition of animal allegory in Scottish poetry.

The only other writer to have dwelt at length on the relationship between Garioch's Scots and Belli's original is Christopher Whyte, who sees the sequence as a whole rather than as a collection of separate poems, and argues that this contributes a complexity and a modernity to the project that has generally been overlooked:

What is the correct way to read the Belli translations? From beginning to end? Dotting back and forth? Attempting to compare and contrast sonnets that are similar in tone or subject matter? In the order in which Garioch translated them? Who will read them more effectively: an audience which has no knowledge of the original, or one which can set Garioch's Scots against Belli's *romanesco*?<sup>49</sup>

Whyte's comment about the ordering suggests that we see the sonnets in the order of their original composition, and not in the order of Garioch's translating; something which Whyte suggests maintains the spirit of the original work, which Belli described as 'a book to pick up and put down, as one does with pastimes, without needing progressively to reorder one's ideas'. The point is well made, because it is very easy to be seduced by the charm or accuracy or felicity of a particular poem, or by the relative lack of success of another, and to ignore the broader canvas—one which is intriguingly modern, since here was a work which was theoretically endless, which was added to at will, which was terminated by the author's death but could easily have been radically different.

<sup>48</sup> Letter to Antonia Stott, 12 May 1976. *GM*, p. 150.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher Whyte. 'Garioch and Belli', in *Frae Ither Tongues: Essays on Modern Translations in Scots*, ed. Bill Findlay. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2001 (forthcoming). I am grateful to Dr Whyte for providing me with an MS copy of his essay.

Like Damiano Abeni, Whyte is impressed by the structural relationship between the original and the translation. The example he uses is 'Ritual Questions': 'where the pattern of Belli's conversation respects the divisions of the sonnet, Garioch runs his conversation against them'. This is obvious if we compare the second stanza of each:

Says he: 'Some sneeshin?' — 'Thanks,' he says, 'I'll try  
ae pinch. Hou're ye?' — Braw, and yirsel? — 'Gey weill,  
thank ye.' — And syne he says: 'Hou dae ye feel,  
this weather?' — 'Garrs me cheenge ma sarks, och aye.' [CPW, p. 263]

Dice: 'Ne prende?' — 'Grazzie tante,' dice. —  
'Come sta?' — 'Bene, e lei?' — 'Grazzie, benone.' —  
Dice: 'Come lo tratta sta staggione?' —  
Dice: 'Accusi: mi fa mutà carnice. [Belli]

Though these structural and linguistic points are important ones, it is clear that they are not the only contributory factors to the success of these sonnets. An equally important factor is the way that Belli's voice—his tone, the subjects he describes, the distance he maintains, what amuses him, what he criticises—is so similar to Garioch's. Partly this is down to felicitous coincidence, of course, though presumably Garioch chose which sonnets to translate with some care. A piece such as 'The Heid-Yins of Rome', with its sarcastic portrayal of the city's great and good who 'frizzle/ us offal, and convert us intill stew' [CPW, p. 263], is one where this signposting is most obvious, but the overarching theme of the sonnets is the puncturing of pretence, whether it be religious hypocrisy or simply amusing sharp practice—such as the dentist in 'The New Quack' who prescribes a cure for being attacked by a mule, to be applied 'aboot ae meenit afore ye git the kick' [CPW, p. 245].

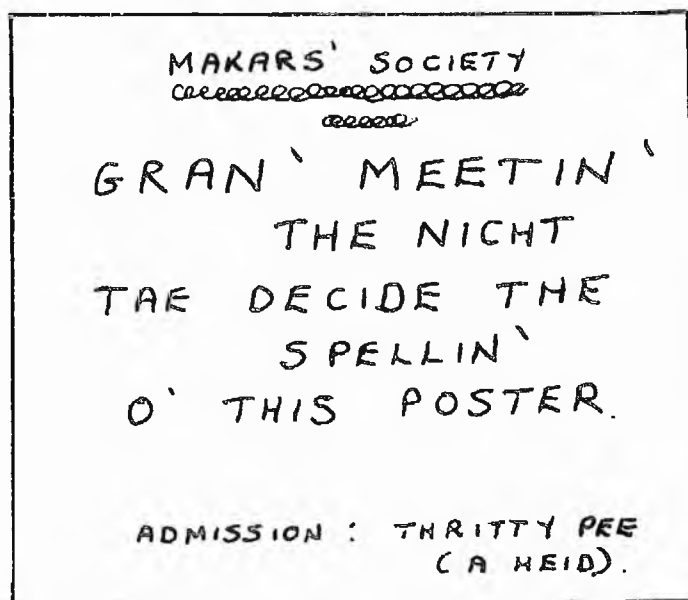
But the real genius of the Belli translations lies in their very improbability. The originals are so rooted in Belli's Rome, so dependent on the Romanesco, that the thought of translating them would seem to be foolhardy in the extreme, and for somebody like Garioch, seemingly rooted in Edinburgh and its poetic heritage, to attempt this would seem doubly unlikely. Yet his masterstroke of translating into the Scots with which he was most comfortable managed to combine incredible loyalty to the Romanesco of Belli with an originality which is practically impossible for the translator to achieve. Their status as a unified but diverse set (a set that, as we have seen, was to have been published as a separate volume), stands in stark contrast to the muddled and frequently reordered sequence we find in the *Collected Poems* and *Complete Poetical Works*, where poems are presented in random sections out of chronological order. As Garioch's final piece of work they stand in fitting tribute to his status not merely as a poet but as a verse craftsman. The significance of *Jephthah and the Baptist* is less straightforward. Stylistically these plays stand apart from Garioch's other work, but

there is surely some significance in the fact that they were the only examples of his work to be published under his 'real' name, perhaps a sign that the serious linguistic motives under which they were published were very close to him. But it may be that their real importance was to demonstrate, in the light of Tyrone Guthrie's seminal 1948 revival of *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis*, that Scots could be a relevant medium for contemporary drama. While the conspicuous lack of a theatrical presentation of these plays may contradict this view, the notable success, for example, of Liz Lochhead's translations of Molière into Scots during the 1990s implies that Garioch's beliefs were perceptive, even if his material was not appreciated at the time.

Garioch's interest in these two rather neglected writers is striking, but what is most striking about both the Buchanan plays and the Belli sonnets is the way in which Garioch makes them his own, takes the raw material and transforms it into something remarkably different. The two works use Scots for very different purposes: the political thrust of *Jephthah and the Baptist* is absent in the Belli sonnets, but both works require Scots, well crafted and intelligently chosen, for their success. Once again, they demonstrate the breadth of influence and variety of style that is evident in Garioch's writing, and they stand as one of his great achievements.

## CHAPTER V

### A.D. Mackie, Harry Houdini and 'that awful man Maurice Lindsay': Rumboat Bleerioch and the Makars



In eighteen loaded words Tom Leonard satirises mercilessly the Lallans movement in Scottish poetry.<sup>1</sup> A glance through the correspondence columns of *Lines Review* during the 'fifties and 'sixties reveals poets with concerns that were doubtless genuine but seem strangely petty or inconsequential. Tom Scott writes with some concern in 1955 that

Lately I have abandoned the Scots (so-called 'Lallans', an accursed term which all good Scots writers should disown) style sheet drawn up in 1947, in some important respects. I now use -ing and -and for gerundal and participial endings...<sup>2</sup>

Later the same year a letter from Edwin Morgan contains a passage in Scots which exhibits some of the many problems which arise from trying to write in a language which has apparently been dying for several centuries:

Ay, ye aye maun luik eftir yuir orthographie, ma freen, fur A'm shair naebodie nooadays wad thole thon auld saxteen-hunner free-fur-aa hwen 'when' cud compeir afoir lairds an leddies sae disguisit intil *quben*, *qubone*, *whan*, an monie ither hwingean hwim-hwams, ye didnae ken hwit ye micht mak o lear an leid baith. Na, na, thae oors hes gane, an A cannae juist imagine thaim revertan.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tom Leonard. *Intimate Voices: Selected Work 1965-1983*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Galloping Dog Press, 1984, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Lines Review* 7 (January 1955), p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *Lines Review* 9 (August 1955), p. 32.

It is not entirely surprising that some writers felt that writing in Scots was not worth the effort, or was no longer relevant. One such was Maurice Lindsay, who renounced Scots categorically in the preface to his 1962 collection *Snow Warning*:

Lallans was a brave last-ditch effort to restore to Lowland Scotland its ancient language. It failed to arouse any measure of popular support. During the 'Fifties, the Scots tongue receded more rapidly than ever before under the impact of television... It is utterly unthinkable that this poor wasted and abandoned speech, however rich in theory its poetic potential, can possibly express what there is to be expressed of the Scottish *ethos* in the age of the beatnik and the hydrogen bomb. The fact is that Lallans has not been used with contemporary significance by any writer during the greater part of the last decade.<sup>4</sup>

A nit-picking review of this work provoked an inevitable ill-tempered exchange between Lindsay, his reviewer in *Lines Review* and the editor, in which Lindsay concluded that he had no intention 'of becoming involved in a new Lallans controversy. Time passes, circumstances change, and most people grow up, though not, apparently, all of those connected with the production of *Lines*'.<sup>5</sup>

Robert Garioch's work was becoming well known by this point, though to title an essay, as David Black did, 'Poets of the Sixties—III: Robert Garioch' is rather misleading.<sup>6</sup> This neatly argued essay examines the differences—and, he suggests, they are many—between Garioch's poetry and that of Hugh MacDiarmid. The *Selected Poems* of 1966 was the first volume of Garioch's poetry to appear before the public, but the implication that Garioch's significant work began only in that decade is quite untrue. Sydney Goodsir Smith makes this clear in his introduction to Garioch's *Selected Poems*, where he commented that

For my own part, quite selfishly, I welcome this book with shouts of joy and reverent hiccups, simply because I can now have such comic masterpieces as 'Embroid to the Ploy' and 'The Canny Hen' and the 'Edinburgh Sonnets' all in one piece, instead of having to look for them scattered here and there in anthologies and old numbers of forgotten and defunct periodicals. [*CP*, p. 8]

As Smith makes clear, Garioch was publishing poetry, mostly in obscure places, long before he became well-known during the 1960s. Indeed, his autobiographical writing shows a consciousness from an early age of the problems of Scots language: such as the

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Lindsay. *Snow Warning*. Arundel: Linden Press, 1962, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Lines Review* 20 (Summer 1963), p. 49. Lindsay is referring here to a heated debate in 1947 in the *Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald* where, he claims, a large proportion of the Scottish public rejected 'Lallans' as a mode of expression. Lindsay recalls that he did not emerge entirely unscathed from this: 'D'ye see that awful man Maurice Lindsay's got another letter in the *Herald* today?' said one Glasgow matron to another in a West End post-office queue of which I was also a member.

'"Oh, has he?" said the other, standing beside me. "Him and his Lallans. He's a terrible man. He beats his wife."' [Maurice Lindsay. *By Yon Bonnie Banks: A Gallimaufry*. London: Hutchinson, 1961, p. 176.]

<sup>6</sup> D.M. Black. 'Poets of the Sixties—III: Robert Garioch', *Lines Review* 23 (Spring 1967), p. 8.

occasion when, as a child, he sat next to Harry Houdini in the Picturedrome in Edinburgh and interpreted the shouts of the other children in the audience for him.<sup>7</sup> Garioch's writing in Scots also goes right back to the 1920s, and is bound up with the first flowering of the Scottish Renaissance. This term is used with caution, because of its inescapable associations with Hugh MacDiarmid, a writer whose relationship with Garioch was at best ambiguous and, even today, is steeped in rumour and innuendo. Garioch himself felt uneasy about the term, as the notes for a lecture on Edwin Muir make clear:

The big nuisance was the idea of 'The Scottish Renaissance'—its journalistic or ad-man's name, not quite accurate even as the name of an idea, invented at the beginning of something—more in hope than in pride—an especial nuisance because it involved politics, hence duty and obedience to a leader—etc. No wonder E.M. would not join up—he was interested in other things much more important to him.<sup>8</sup>

The distinction between Muir and Garioch himself is, one suspects, blurred. Garioch too showed few signs of 'joining up' with any self-conscious movements in Scots poetry. However, that is not to say that the furrow he ploughed was an entirely lonely one, and this chapter will examine those contemporary trends which were important to Garioch and the cross-currents which flowed between Garioch and other writers.

It may be, as Mario Relich points out, that 'it has become a critical commonplace that Robert Garioch and Hugh MacDiarmid heartily disliked each other'.<sup>9</sup> That this view is commonplace is understandable, given the unpleasant exchanges that often seemed to take place between the two men. James Caird offers the most balanced account of this:

He deliberately repudiated the influence of MacDiarmid, although the fact of MacDiarmid's astonishing achievement must have had an effect. He had little sympathy with what he considered to be MacDiarmid's fanaticism and fiercely polemical attitudes. He thought MacDiarmid's later poems pedantic and pretentious. MacDiarmid in his turn had little patience with Garioch's apolitical stance. Many years ago, in the 1930s, in Milne's Bar in Edinburgh, I heard MacDiarmid saying to him, apropos, of Communism, 'If you are not for me (and Garioch wasn't) you are against me'. Later, MacDiarmid constantly depreciated Garioch's work. At one time he even threatened him with legal proceedings over some remark Garioch was said to have made at a conference in Edinburgh, a remark inaccurately and distortedly reported to MacDiarmid by malicious third parties.<sup>10</sup>

These incidents and others like them obscure the common ground that existed, at one stage, between the two men. One of Garioch's notebooks contains an article on

<sup>7</sup> Robert Garioch. 'Early Days in Edinburgh', in *As I Remember*, ed. Maurice Lindsay. London: Robert Hale, 1979, pp. 50–1.

<sup>8</sup> NLS, MS26617, fol. 4. The notebook is undated, but its design suggests that it comes from the 1970s; the untidy handwriting and the presence of notes about Sir David Lindsay would seem to confirm this (Garioch was working on an edition of Lindsay for Carcanet at the time of his death).

<sup>9</sup> Mario Relich. 'Scottish Tradition and Robert Garioch's Individual Talent', p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> James Caird. 'A Personal Appreciation', p. 76.

contemporary Scottish verse and the use of Scots, which describes MacDiarmid as 'the great force in Scottish writing, and who set it going in the twenties'.<sup>11</sup> For MacDiarmid's part, even as late as the mid-1950s he was accepting enthusiastically Garioch's submissions to *The Voice of Scotland*:

Dear Garioch,

Many thanks indeed for your 'Disparplit' which I'd be delighted to use in the next issue of the Voice of Scotland. It's good news too that you have done Buchanan's *Jeptha* [sic] into Scots and the sample you enclose is excellent. I do hope you'll be able to translate the *Baptist* too: and publish both translations in book form. By that token it is also high time we had a book of your Scots verse. I'd like to see a collection for you are one of the very few who can really handle the language—and one of the very few Scots poets whose later work keeps getting better and better.<sup>12</sup>

Other contemporary correspondence with MacDiarmid indicates a respectful friendship. While it would hardly be a radical departure to accuse MacDiarmid of inconsistency of viewpoint, it is nevertheless interesting to see that a letter to Tom Scott a decade later shows a completely different opinion:

I am sorry but not surprised OUP have turned down Garioch's collected poems, tho' I agree that the long delay is inexcusable. I do not know why OUP should have delayed because it must have been clear right away that the publication could not be commercially successful. I am of course sorry that Garioch should have to endure this long suspense and then find his hopes disappointed. But in so far as I know his work there is very little of it of value. His strength lies in his knowledge of Scots, and particularly of demotic Edinburgh dialect but he has no elevation and is in general I think not only dull but vulgar in the worst sense.<sup>13</sup>

Yet barely two years later MacDiarmid appeared in print voicing precisely the opposite opinion. MacDiarmid was opposed strongly to the setting up of *Scottish International Review*, a periodical edited by Bob Tait with Garioch and Edwin Morgan as Editorial Advisers. As John Herdman points out,<sup>14</sup> he was sufficiently suspicious to write an article for *Catalyst for the Scottish Viewpoint*, an extreme Nationalist periodical published by the 1320 Club, a collection of renegade Scottish Nationalists, in which he characteristically alleges that a conspiracy is taking place:

There has been a good deal of propaganda in the Scottish Press about the imminent launching of a new periodical to be called 'Scottish International'... The editors are to be Edwin Morgan, Robert Tait and Robert Garioch... I view with suspicion anything emanating [sic] from the quarters named and I believed that the intention was to divert attention from the objectives of the Scottish Renaissance Movement with regard to our culture...<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> NLS, MS26573, fol. 150.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Christopher Grieve, 10 September 1955. NLS, MS26561, fol. 97.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Tom Scott, 5 November 1965. *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Alan Bold. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984, p. 703.

<sup>14</sup> John Herdman. *Poets, Pubs, Polls & Pillar Boxes: Memoirs of an Era in Scottish Politics and Letters*. Kirkcaldy: Akros Publications, 1999, pp. 28–9.

<sup>15</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Greeks Bearing Gifts', *Catalyst for the Scottish Viewpoint*, December 1967, p. 6.

This is predictable enough. What makes it interesting is John Herdman's suggestion that MacDiarmid's article was

no doubt partly fuelled by his simmering feud with Garioch: it was well known that there was little love lost between them and that MacDiarmid regarded the younger poet as having a 'soft centre'.

But in fact this article pays Garioch a back-handed compliment. It continues:

There is worse to come. Of the editors both Morgan and Tait have associated themselves with developments at the furthest remove from any concern with Scottish native values. Mr Tait is a former editor of 'Sidewalk' and Mr Morgan an advocate and practitioner of 'concrete poetry'—a development which must be anathema to everyone concerned with Scottish literature. Neither of these men have in the past been associated with anything of specifically Scottish concern or value. Why are they now selected to edit this new periodical?

Robert Garioch is an excellent and far too little appreciated Scots poet in the genuine tradition of Robert Fergusson but, while one is delighted at any recognition coming to him now, it is impossible not to feel that he has been included as a 'yes man' on this occasion...

Even by MacDiarmid's standards this is pretty rich and one imagines that by this stage in his career Garioch was pretty fed up of this sort of posturing. A letter from Sydney Tremayne contemporary with this article suggests sardonically that 'Grieve is just a 75-year-old juvenile delinquent. One thing is certain: his support would be more deadly than his hostility'.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, one can understand the occasional exasperated moments in the poetry, such as the poem 'Ten Couplets', where impatience with MacDiarmid is excised in the final version, which begins

Whit man dais onieething muckle, till  
he gets owre his fear of being a fuil?

and concludes

Ye neednae multiplie our ills,  
makkan us feart of being fuils. [*CPW*, p. 165]

This could be a reference to MacDiarmid's looming presence, and it is quite clear from Robin Fulton's analysis of the ms that this is indeed the intention. The original poem contains fourteen couplets and is called 'To Hugh MacDiarmid'. Fulton continues:

The ninth couplet in the ms is:

Whit wey is't, our best makar shuid  
be sic an enemy til the guid?

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Sydney Tremayne. NLS, MS26568, fol. 24. Edwin Morgan recollected in his interview with me that MacDiarmid's first thoughts about the magazine had been 'that it wouldn't be Scottish enough... he didn't see the three of us as being devoted to the future and affairs of Scotland. He was actually wrong about that but that was the impression he got. In a way he was going back on his own earlier beliefs because when he was a young man, he was both Scottish and international. But he'd changed so much by that time... 1962 was a big year for him, because that was the first time he'd ever been published properly—his *Selected Poems* came out in 1962—so that was him reaching the peak of his career and he didn't want that to be disturbed. He felt that he had something to do, something to give, and the others would follow if possible what he was doing.'



Then the last four, addressed to MacDiarmid, run:

Ye ken'd the ice-age, we maun mind,  
geynear hauf a century syne.

Here's our encouragement, your wark  
staunds as ye made it, strang and stark.

Here are your poems for us to read  
as they cam (maistly) frae your heid.

And, reading them, we ken, forbye,  
whit no to dae, and whit to try.

A note against the second last stanza reads: 'Better suppress this: a pity, though'. [*CPW*, pp. 308-9]

It is clear that MacDiarmid's primary influence on Garioch was as a focus for disagreement; there are few if any stylistic similarities between MacDiarmid's Scots poems and Garioch's, and in any case MacDiarmid had long since ceased publishing significantly in Scots.

Mention of MacDiarmid's 1950s resurrection of *The Voice of Scotland* reminds us of the rôle of the publisher Callum Macdonald, under whose imprint M. Macdonald the periodical reappeared. Macdonald is best known as the publisher of *Lines Review*, one of the longer-lasting Scottish literary periodicals (1952-1998), a publication for which Garioch often wrote. Less obvious is the support given by Macdonald to Garioch's book publishing, which was important enough to merit the dedication to Garioch's *Collected Poems*.<sup>17</sup> Macdonald's generosity was not quite as free as that implies, however, as this letter to Michael Schmidt of Carcanet makes clear:

I should tell you more about Callum Macdonald, whose publishing you might not understand, about his exploitation of the market, since he was the first (at Sydney Goodsir Smith's urgent urging) to publish my *Selected*, and, in fact, years before (at the same urging) he published my *Masque of Edinburgh*.<sup>18</sup>

Sydney Goodsir Smith seems, in fact, to have been one of the most consistent advocates of Garioch's work. Smith contributed a characteristic introduction to *The Masque of Edinburgh*, where he recalls that Garioch was the dedicatee of the first four fitts of *Carotid Cornucopius*,<sup>19</sup> Smith's bizarre Edinburgh 'novel':

<sup>17</sup> The dedication reads 'This book is dedicated to CALLUM MACDONALD. No publisher was ever more considerate'. (*CP*, p. v).

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Michael Schmidt, 13 June 1979. [*GM*, p. 146]

<sup>19</sup> Sydney Goodsir Smith. *Carotid Cornucopius*. Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1964. The first four fitts to which Smith refers (this edition of *The Masque of Edinburgh* dates from 1954) were, however, published in 1947, as Garioch recalls in his essay on the novel in *For Sydney Goodsir Smith*. Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1975.

your humile and maist sobredient varmint, the prosinct scraptor, did maist drouthicouthilie and rumsounduntinlie salude the sode Maister Rumboat Bleerioch's muchtie atomb (as thon it waste) o the *Bosque o Embro*...<sup>20</sup>

The radical excesses of Smith's prose are not mirrored in his poetry, which is carefully crafted and reminiscent of the sixteenth-century makars but has very few similarities to Garioch's writing.<sup>21</sup> That is not terribly surprising, given that Garioch was imbued with the rhythms and sounds of Edinburgh speech from boyhood; Goodsir Smith was, of course, born in New Zealand. Garioch touches on this difference in an article on 'The Use of Scots' in the first issue of *Scottish International*:

The makar, then, has two chances: he may be brought up with a Scots tongue in his heid, or he may learn from others who have it. Mr Sydney Goodsir Smith is a shining example of one who came from furth of Scotland and learned to use the language.<sup>22</sup>

One of Smith's successors as Editor of *Lines Review* was A.D. Mackie, a figure who appears regularly in interviews with Garioch. For example, in his interview with Marjorie Wilson he talks of some of the things that encouraged him to write in Scots. 'Like everyone else,' he says, 'I suffer more or less from belonging to a half-nation betrayed to and taken over by the English Government of 1707. So there is a political reason for writing Scots, but poetical reasons come first in poetry, I hope.' The interviewer then mentions as an aside that 'in the early '30s he was very much influenced by A.D. Mackie's *Poems in Two Tongues*', then goes on to ask Garioch about poetic licence.<sup>23</sup> We too may be tempted to brush aside the importance of an apparently minor figure, but to do so is to ignore one of the major influences on Garioch's writing.

Having said that, the book itself, while interesting enough as a period piece, does not seem to have much in common with Garioch's work. It opens with a rather self-conscious preface, which begins:

Just as Scots poets cannot resist the temptation to try their hands at writing in their Vernacular, so are they constitutionally unable to issue a book without a preface. The time may come when our poets will have the audacity to present their countrymen with productions of Scottish poetry without apologising, but that time is not yet. The author must explain, above all, what moved him to write in Scots.<sup>24</sup>

These reasons include the unusual linguistic upbringing which, especially, Mackie's and Garioch's contemporaries experienced, where 'Scots... was not his mother tongue, but neither, for that matter of it, was English'. The result of the institutional teaching of

<sup>20</sup> Introduction to *The Masque of Edinburgh*, repr. in *GM*, p. 103.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Sydney Goodsir Smith. *Collected Poems*. London: John Calder, 1975.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Garioch. 'The Use of Scots', *Scottish International* 1 (January 1968), p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Marjorie Wilson. 'Auld Makar of Edinburgh', p. 584.

<sup>24</sup> Albert D. Mackie. *Poems in Two Tongues*. Edinburgh: The Darien Press, 1928, p. ix. All further references to this book are embedded in the text.

English was, as Garioch would argue some five years later in the article 'Purity or Smeddum', a 'purging of his tongue of the national elements called in England "Scotticisms".' However, this process only made him more aware of the Scots that surrounded him and more keen to use it himself. Mackie concludes that

We seem to be at the beginnings of a national literature. We cannot see the work of Hugh M'Diarmid without believing this. The race of makars cannot perish after a work like 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle'... It will be seen that, in the matter of 'As To How', M'Diarmid-Grieve and I disagree: I write on the basis of a living dialect, even indicating this in my spelling, whereas he sets his face against all dialect and writes mainly on a basis of aggregate vocabulary and idiom. Observe more closely, however, and you will shortly perceive that Grieve-M'Diarmid and I are only quarrelling lovers, keeping opposite sides of the road, but walking in the same direction. Both of us are aiming at the same thing—a Standard Scots which may through time be held in the same esteem as King's English. We disagree only as to how to get there, and in our quarrel only Time and the Scottish people can arbitrate... [*Poems in Two Tongues*, pp. x–xi]

The sentiment is a fine one, even if it is expressed in sometimes rather curious terms. (Mackie's awkwardness is perpetuated in the layout of the book, which is laid out in two very definite sections, one for the poems in Scots, the other for the poems in English—for all his talk of confusion of dialects, he compartmentalises his own writing pretty well.) In fact, MacDiarmid refers to this introduction in an article in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, as a way of backing up his assertion that 'The experiments suggested by Mr Spence [Lewis Spence, writer of a previous article in that periodical with which MacDiarmid is disagreeing], myself, and others have not failed, then. It would be truer to say that they have scarcely been tried yet. The younger men are taking them up. The hope and purpose expressed by Mr Mackie are widely shared'.<sup>25</sup> He also describes Mackie as 'one of the most interesting of the younger poets'.<sup>26</sup>

The debt to MacDiarmid to which Mackie alludes in the Preface is at its most obvious in the poem 'To Hugh M'Diarmid', a rather cloying tribute to MacDiarmid's importance. Mackie recalls that

...twae books gied me something strange  
Ne'er fund in a' my world's range—  
Yin by an Irish chield ca'd Joyce,  
And yin by you in Doric voice.<sup>27</sup>  
Guidsakes, I never thocht tae see  
The Scottish Muse stravaig sae free  
Through a' o' Yirth and Hell and Heeven...

Scotland has haen yae God owre lang  
But when her deafness hears your sang

<sup>25</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid. 'Contemporary Scottish Poetry: Another View', in *The Raule Tongue*, ed. Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach, 2 vols. Manchester: Carcanet, 1997, vol. II, p. 168.

<sup>26</sup> *The Raule Tongue*, vol. II, p. 167.

<sup>27</sup> A footnote here indicates that Mackie is referring to *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*.

I dootnae Rab will hide his face  
And Hugh M'Diarmid take his place... [*Poems in Two Tongues*, p. 44]

Mackie goes on to refer to MacDiarmid's trenchant views on Burns and popular Scottish culture, but even as early as 1928 he seems to be warning that MacDiarmid's approach was a slightly dangerous one, as he recalled later:

In my poem to MacDiarmid in *Poems in Two Tongues* ('The only poem you ever wrote', said Chris Grieve in his Shavian mood), I recorded my fear that MacDiarmid would be another Robert Burns, monopolising the country's homage and spawning nothing but inferior imitators.<sup>28</sup>

Some confusion becomes apparent in Mackie's poem 'Midlothian Tam o' Shanter', which is obviously influenced greatly by Burns, but is not funny enough for pastiche and not different enough to be a Modernist reaction. Several of the poems, such as 'Woman Speaks' [*Poems in Two Tongues*, p. 28], are successful, yet few have obvious similarities to any of Garioch's work. It would certainly seem that the influence was restricted to the simple fact that Mackie had the courage to write in Scots. However, the issue of Albert Mackie's influence on Garioch is not quite that simple. In the autobiographical essay which Garioch contributed to Maurice Lindsay's 1979 book *As I Remember*, he explains that Mackie was a near neighbour of his as a child, although he was unaware of him at the time, and that 'his book *Poems in Two Tongues* became a powerful incentive to me in the early thirties'.<sup>29</sup> He expands on this in an interview with Donald Campbell in 1977:

D.C.: And what would you say your earliest influences were, as far as poetry was concerned?

R.G.: I don't know—there weren't all that many. I can tell you—I always tell everybody this and it's true—I thought that if A.D. Mackie could do this, perhaps I could give it a try.

D.C.: His *Poems in Two Tongues* came out in 1928, was it?

R.G.: I forget—but it was about that time. He belonged to our own district, you see. At least, he didn't belong there, but he lived there for a long time, up in Gayfield there, when we were living in Bellevue. We thought such a lot of him. He was in the *Scotsman* office by that time.<sup>30</sup> And I thought, yes, I'd like to do what he was doing. That was the only early influence—apart from reading Scots at school, and we didn't do much of that, of course. Oh yes, and a whole lot of Scots comedians—an environment of Scots singers and reciters and all *that*.<sup>31</sup>

The strongest connection between the two writers seems to be that they shared the same childhood experiences in Edinburgh, although they were not conscious of having known each other. The poems where each writer describes this upbringing are where

<sup>28</sup> A.D. Mackie, 'Scottish Poetry in the Twenties', *Akros* 28 (August 1975), p. 21. Mackie points out later that 'of Robert Garioch I was not to hear until 1930'; other articles in the same issue deal with the other decades of the century.

<sup>29</sup> 'Early Days in Edinburgh', p. 53.

<sup>30</sup> This contradicts Mackie's entry in Trevor Royle's *Mainstream Companion to Scottish Literature*, which suggests that 'between 1930 and 1935 he was a leader writer for *The Scotsman*'. [p. 206]

<sup>31</sup> 'A Conversation with Donald Campbell', p. 12.

Garioch and Mackie seem to be closest to each other: specifically Mackie's sequence 'Children' and Garioch's poem 'Fi'baw in the Street'. The poems must be almost exact contemporaries of each other, since Garioch's was written when he was at University, around the time when Mackie's book was published.<sup>32</sup> Garioch describes on several occasions how the poem came to be written:

I studied Honours English... and we used to stick our poems on the board of the English Library. Vexed by the englishness of other people's poems, I reacted by presenting 'Fi'baw in the Street', glottal stops and all. I thought I was being rude, but it was well received. Mr Murison's *Guid Scots Tongue* tells us how Allan Ramsay's work was one of reaction. I regard mine as a small part of that reaction, which has never quite ceased since Ramsay began it, sometime about 1720.<sup>33</sup>

Both poems display the rebelliousness of wee boys mucking about in the street, regarding any grown-up either as a plaything (in the opening of Mackie's poem) or a figure of authority to be baited (in Garioch's). Mackie's pedlar descends gently from being the object of polite curiosity in the first stanza of the sequence to being the butt of impatient behaviour in the third:

Auld Mrs Murdy, in the Coo Gait,  
Sells yellie buckies on a blue plate.  
Wee bits o' clarty weans wi' great roond een  
Staund govin' by as she picks wi' a preen.  
  
Folk come and staund and taste at the fush,  
Folk gang by in a dander or a rush,  
But the twae-three weans wi' the muckle roond een  
Watch Mrs Murdy and her eident preen.  
  
Whiles yin midges, tries her ither fit,  
Whiles anither crosses his legs for a bit,  
Or wipes at his nose, or blipes at his een,  
Then goves at the fush-wife and her preen. [*Poems in Two Tongues*, p. 37]

Meanwhile, a healthy disrespect for the rule of law is evident in Garioch's poem:

Shote! here's the poliss,  
the Gayfield poliss,  
    an thull pi'iz in the nick fir  
    pleyan fi'baw in the street!  
Yin o thum's a faw'y  
like a muckle foazie taw'y,  
    bi' the ither's lang and skinnylike,  
    wi umburrelly feet.  
Ach, awaw, says Tammy Curtis,  
fir thir baith owre blate ti hurt iz,  
    thir a glaikit pair o Teuchters  
    an as Hielant as a peat. [*CPW*, p. 123]

<sup>32</sup> Sorley Maclean recalls that 'When I came to Edinburgh University in October 1929 Robert Garioch Sutherland was beginning his fourth year' ('A Recollection' [*GM*, p. 13]).

<sup>33</sup> 'Early Days in Edinburgh', p. 58.

Both these poems reek of the supposedly mythical urban, working-class Scotland of *Oor Wullie* and *The Broons* (down to the narrator's exasperated 'Jings!' in the penultimate line), and would suggest that even if those cartoons may seem slightly dated now they are a pretty convincing portrayal of a way of life that did once exist. Arguably Garioch's poem is the more successful. Even this brief quotation from the opening of the poem displays the raw speech of schoolboys free from the strictures of grammar or formality. But the poem in its entirety is a hugely enjoyable romp which follows the consequences of two schoolboys' game of street football. It combines humour, pace and acute observation with an early indication of Garioch's rhythmic skill. Like Mackie, Garioch uses a pathetic woman as the unwilling play-companion of his young boys, 'the hurdygurdy wummin/ tha' we coupit wi her puggy', then describes in farcical detail the ensuing pursuit, complete with comic-book caricature policemen:

An aw the time the skinnylinky  
copper's a' ir heels,  
though the faw'y's deid ir deean,  
this yin seems ti rin on wheels:  
noo he's stickit on a railin wi  
his helmet on a spike,  
noo he's up an owre an rinnan, did  
ye iver see the like? [*CPW*, p. 123]

All the details are exaggerated for humorous effect: the fat policeman supposedly on the point of expiry while his colleague seems unable to stop, one minute stuck in a railing, the next minute performing somersaults and resuming the chase. The speed of the chase is emphasised by the rhythmical pace, which continues right to the end of the poem where the breathless boys are hiding out of reach:

syne we cooshy doon thegither  
jist like choockies wi a hen  
in a bonny wee-bit bunky-hole  
tha' bobbies dinny ken. [*CPW*, p. 124]

However, an examination of Garioch's letters shows that he is being a little disingenuous when he suggests that it was Mackie's *poetry* that inspired him to write. This seems to be true enough, but it transpires that Mackie was responsible for a good deal of professional help later in Garioch's career. A letter of Christmas Day, 1946, from the Editor of the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*,<sup>34</sup> one A.D. Mackie, makes this clear, as well as betraying a few of the writer's prejudices:

Dear Mr Sutherland,

I have your address from Sydney [G] Smith, + hope this gets to you. My object in writing is to let you know I am starting to publish modern Scots poetry (in Scots or English)

<sup>34</sup> A paper on which Christopher Grieve worked briefly during 1911 (see Glen Murray's article, 'MacDiarmid's Media 1911-1936' in *The Rauchle Tongue*, vol. 1, p. xi).

in the Dispatch, sporadically, as space permits. The idea is to give a boost to Scots literature of today in the year of Edinburgh's Music Festival + generally create an atmosphere encouraging to the arts.

The paper has to face some handicaps, of course, in such an undertaking. This is poetry being tossed into the laps of some 100,000 people, most of whom are unlikely to have read anything but Ella Wheeler Wilcox or 'By hook or by crook' since they left school dear knows how long ago. So it would be flying in the face of Providence to skelp them with something obscure or too plastic or synthetic. Such a largely non-literary public (including juveniles) also limits us in other respects that I don't need to dwell on. At the same time I am convinced that a sufficient proportion would welcome something new + more definitely literary than 'popular' papers are wont to give them, + that even more are better able to 'take' serious efforts at poetry than timid editors are inclined to assume. It struck me that you would have some Edinburgh pieces about you that might lend distinction to our columns. As I want to avoid glossaries as far as possible, the more self-explanatory the Scots is the better; I would also like to eschew the off-putting apostrophe. The space consideration determines also a preference for the short lyric of at most four stanzas—the shorter the better.

If the inspiration is working, within these limits I think it's a chance for Auld Reekie bards.

Yours sincerely,

A.D. Mackie<sup>35</sup>

Mackie's throwaway comment about Ella Wheeler Wilcox has strong echoes of MacDiarmid's essay 'Scottish Nationalism and the Burns Cult', where MacDiarmid talks of 'people who—if they are honest with themselves—will admit overwhelming preferences for Kipling or Ella Wheeler Wilcox'.<sup>36</sup> Subsequent correspondence indicates that Garioch had at least nine poems published in the *Evening Dispatch*.<sup>37</sup> Mackie continued to encourage Garioch, and one letter reveals in the process one of the less obvious problems inherent in publishing Scots poetry:

'Twa Fules' particularly is good. I hope you do not mind but I have adapted them to our 'gnu spelling'—the reason being that I have had to educate our printers to spell Scots and it is too much to give them copy which undermines the spelling system they have taken so long to learn. I can assure you this does no harm whatever to your poetry, which stands up to this better than most.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Letter from A.D. Mackie, 25 December 1946. NLS, MS26561, fol. 13. The character 'G' in the first line is illegible in the MS, but presumably the person referred to is Sydney Goodsir Smith. If so, it is interesting to see that, at another significant juncture in Garioch's career, Goodsir Smith is an important presence in the background.

<sup>36</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Scottish Nationalism and the Burns Cult,' in *The Rauchle Tongue*, vol. 11, p. 42.

<sup>37</sup> These include 'Thochts on the Festival' [published 12 April 1947], 'Eros' [7 October 1947], 'Twa Fules' [7 November 1947], 'The Nostalgie' [5 January 1948], 'Summer' [20 March 1948], 'Southron Simmer' [6 July 1948], 'Myself When Old' [26 October 1948], 'Refusal to Admire' [19 November 1948] and 'Winter' [28 February 1949]. Not all of these poems were subsequently collected, but at least one which was is misdated by Robin Fulton. 'Twa Fuils' [sic] [*CPW*, p. 150] is has the note 'Feb.-Mar. 1967?' [*CPW*, p. 306] but evidently predates this considerably.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from A.D. Mackie, 23 September 1947. NLS MS26561, f.16. It may be that this action of Mackie's was the basis of the Makars' Club Scots Style Sheet of 1947, in which Mackie states that 'in my ain paper I pat this style sheet intil use for the prentin o Scots verse and maist o the makars and their readers got intil the wey o't.' (repr. in *Lines Review* 9 [August 1955], p. 30.)

It is evident that Garioch benefited from knowing people who were in a position to promulgate his poetry. However, Garioch was not just experimenting with poetry at this point: he was also exploring the possibilities of using Scots for other purposes, such as prose writing and criticism. Several of these pieces were reprinted in the Scots periodical *Lallans* during the 1970s and 1980s. One of these pieces is a short story entitled 'Idyll on Soutra', which 'Garioch scrievit... in the early 1930s, tho it hasna been in prent or nou'.<sup>39</sup> There is not a great deal to this: it is a pastoral description of two lovers out for a country walk, which has no development or plot of any kind, and finishes not with a malicious twist but a contented resolution:

The hale warld bleezed up in a gled o licht an lowe an a gled o gledness, thit cooled ti a spale o gowd thit wad bide wi them baith: it was theirs, o thir ain makin, an on the bus gaen hame, Brenda and Peter had the spales o gowd weel hained oot o sicht, an aw was weel wi them baith.<sup>40</sup>

The main interest in this piece is that the male character is called Peter Potter, since this was the name of an unfinished vaguely autobiographical novel that Garioch was writing at, it would appear, the same time.<sup>41</sup> Garioch described it in a letter to Sydney Tremayne in 1972 which makes clear his feelings at that time for MacDiarmid:

And that early novel... A load of tripes. ole boy, [sic] full of Social Credit and Antizygy [sic], written in those callow days when I still thought Hugh MacDiarmid was a poet at least as good as Eliot and Pound and a Scotsman to boot.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, Garioch was also giving a great deal of thought to the theory of writing in Scots (as evidenced by the article on 'The Makars' in Chapter 1). Evidently he was concerned that the revival of writing in Scots, which was then very much in its infancy, should have a critical basis. Garioch's writing for the *Scots Observer* has been discussed already, but he also wrote an article for the paper which effectively describes the development of his own Scots style. *Lallans* suggests, in the introduction to its 1982 reprint, that this is probably one of the first pieces of its type—or, to use their exact words, it 'maun be ane o the earliest ensamples o uisin Scots for what the "scholars" cry "expository prose".' It is worth quoting at length, since it gives us a good idea of the thoughts that were going through Garioch's mind long before he became a published poet:

Some twaw-three years syne, when A first ettled ti write poetry in what A fondly imagined ti be ma ain Edinburgh dialect, that is, in the very mainner in whilk the words form thirsels within ma heid, or iver they are sorted up to suit the conversational tone o braw leddies in a drawinroom, ir that o

<sup>39</sup> *Lallans* 5 (Mairtinmas 1975), p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Lallans* 5, p. 20.

<sup>41</sup> See NLS, MS26608/9. These contain drafts, partial ms and partial ts of *Peter Potter* (he gives alternative titles *Peter's Pounds* and *Common Good*), marked very clearly 'not for publication'. They are not dated, but the NLS catalogue describes them as 'early'.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Sydney Tremayne, 18 December 1972. NLS, MS26673, fol. 13.



drucken cairters in a pib, accordin ti whichiver phase o Society A may happen ti be sib wi at the moment, A fund masel maistly sneered it iz yit anither synthetic Scot; an iz yit anither synthetic Scot A hae been generally lauched it iver eftir. I wad therefore like ti say a word ir twaw anent ma Edinburgh dialect in particular, an the Scottish tongue generally. Noo, it hiz aye appeared ti me thit, gin ony Scottish speech wud be true an naiteral-like, it maun follow the same development in the individual iz ony ither language ir dialect whatsoever. Ony sort o hauf-educated buddy, ony man, that is, whaw hiz eneuch buik-leir ti gar him ettle ti write somethin o his ain, maun develop his language bi the same process; nae maitter whither he writes in Braid Scots ir in Standard English. This process, ti ma wey o thinkin, begins in oor early childhood, when we first begin ti parrot the soons spoken bi the folks roon aboot iz. The foond o oor tongue, therefore, is accent: the wee bairn stammers oot his smaw speech in the accent o his ain fireside; the accent thit will bide in his speech till his voice is heard nae mair. The words thirsels hae less import than the accent in whilk they are spoken.

As the bairn grows in knowledge an in years, his mind becomes filled wi new ideas thit maun be expressed in the general standard terminology, as the local mainner o speakin canny cope wi the situation. At the skuil, forbye, the growin bairn maun read Standard English words, an iz like iz no, will mak a stoot-herted, bit no ower successfy attempt ti pronounce them accordin ti the standard wey o speakin. Finally, the later development o the speech o ony individual whaw gaes aboot a bit an reads onything thit he may git a haud o, involves the assimilation o aw kinds o words an phrases, ivy yin o whilk, hooiver, is pronounced mair ir less in his ain local accent.

Noo, ti apply thae general considerations ti the case o the dialect o ma three poems, A hae ettled in the first o them ti describe a wee laddie's adventure frae a bairn's point o view, in the accent o a wee Edinburgh keelie. A'll no say it's juist as bonny a dialect iz some thit A hae heard; bit thayr it is: A happened ti be brocht up in it, an maun e'en tak it iz A find it.<sup>43</sup>

This is followed by three poems which Garioch uses to demonstrate the progression of Scots from that spoken by a young child to the speech of a mature man; it seems to describe his own experience, though this is not stated explicitly. He comments that

In aw three poems A hae ettled ti yase the function o accent in a mainner worthy o the importance thit it possesses, ti ma wey o thinkin, in the formation o ony form o the Scots tongue, bi writin doon the words as A wud naitionally pronounce them under ideal circumstances, wi as muckle phonetic accuracy iz ye cin manage without yaising byornar alphabetic characters.

It is interesting that the main critical thrust of this article is an apparent rejection of synthetic Scots, a phrase which brings to mind immediately MacDiarmid's Scots writing. It would seem that, even this early in this career, Garioch was conscious that the way forward offered by MacDiarmid was not the only option. His choice of words is notable when he comments that, when he began to write, he was 'maistly sneered it iz yit anither synthetic Scot; an iz yit anither synthetic Scot A hae been generally lauched it iver aftir.' His description of the adaptation of vocabulary and assimilation of English words that occurs in a Scots speaker seems to mitigate directly against the dictionary-trawling favoured by MacDiarmid. Garioch's point is that the richest form of the language will be the one which has been allowed to 'follow the same development in the

<sup>43</sup> Robert Garioch. 'Purity or Smeddum—The Alternatives of Scottish Dialect', *Scots Observer* vol. 7 no. 333 (18 February 1933). Repr. as 'On Scievin Scots' in *Lallans* 18 (Whitsunday 1982), pp. 5–6.

individual iz ony ither language ir dialect whatsoiver'. He makes his suggestion explicit in the final paragraph, where he states that

A wud apply this theory o the naiteral individual development o dialect ti the question o synthetic Scots. Ti ma mind, the only true an naiteral Scottish literature maun follow this development, an the mair advantage it taks o the widenin o scope afforded bi the latter stages o that process, the richer a medium will it produce. On the ither haun, naethin cud be mair artificial than ti gaun ti a fairmhoose wi a wee notebuik, notin doon the words iz thi tumble frae the lips o the fermer an his guid wife; subsequently connin them weel at hame, an manufacturin a poem accordin ti the limitations o the speech o siclike country buddies. A poem o this kind is mibby pure eneuch; but like mony anither pure article, it's no muckle the better for't. [p. 8]

It seems that Garioch's intellectual differences, whether or not conscious at this stage, to MacDiarmid's opinions made his opposition inevitable. However, that opposition did not affect Garioch's writing, and it says a great deal about his temperament, and the seriousness with which he regarded his writing, that he was able to rise above the criticism of such a formidable figure (or, on the occasions when the temptation did become overwhelming, he was wise enough to suppress it). Similarly, he was able to rise above some of the crankier excesses of the Lallans movement and write confidently in a style and idiom with which he was comfortable and familiar. But it is possible that Garioch's isolation from these two forces has contributed in some way to his critical neglect: by shying away from association with these more publicity-hungry elements he was content to carry on modestly and to let others judge him if they wished. This may, in terms of his reputation, have been a tactical error, but it typifies the spirit of the man who opened *Chuckies on the Cairn* (and his *Collected* and *Selected Poems*) with this modest dedication:

These twa-three chuckie-stanes  
I lay on Scotland's cairn  
biggit by men of bigger banes  
afore I was a bairn,

and men of greater micht  
will trauchle up the brae  
and lay abuin them on the hicht  
mair wechty stanes nor thae. [CPW, p. 3]

## CONCLUSION

Robert Garioch is something of an enigma. His work is universally admired yet much of it is almost unknown. He was active during the Scottish Renaissance but was never consciously part of it. He started his career as a supporter of MacDiarmid but grew suspicious of him. He was an Edinburgh man who spent the best years of his life working in London. It is now nearly twenty years since his death, and a reappraisal of his standing is long overdue.

It will be obvious from this thesis that Garioch's work is at once steeped in the Scottish poetic tradition yet slightly apart from it. The respect for Robert Fergusson is striking, genuine and deeply felt—whether it manifests itself explicitly in the poems 'To Robert Fergusson' and 'At Robert Fergusson's Grave' or implicitly, by echoes of subjects, or of style, or of description, in so many places in other poems. That the respect for Fergusson was a very personal matter, and not simply a convenient poetic coincidence, makes it all the more obvious. But it should also now be obvious that Garioch felt uneasy about the comparison being flogged to death, and that other external influences, where they exist, are just as significant, and they lend a variety and scale to Garioch's work which has often been ignored. No writer whose poetry can echo that of Dunbar or Henryson, or be influenced so strongly by Buchanan, without descending into pastiche or predictability, can be accused of one-dimensionality. Similarly, Garioch is by no means the only Scottish poet to have been attracted by the tragedy of Fergusson's story; indeed, Robert Louis Stevenson was far more touched by the tragedy of Fergusson than Garioch seems to have been:

I had always a great sense of kinship with poor Robert Fergusson—so clever a boy, so wild, of such a mixed strain, so unfortunate, born in the same town with me, and, as I always felt rather by express intimation than from evidence, so like myself.<sup>1</sup>

But it is where Garioch departs from the Scottish poetic tradition, or turns it on its head, where he is at his most successful. The Edinburgh Sonnets and 'Embroid to the Ploy' combine an awareness of the historical precedent with an interest in quite contemporary matters that is refreshing in a stereotypically 'traditional' poet, and his trademark of extraordinary freedom within a strict rhyme scheme. He executes a virtuosic juggling act in the Belli sonnets, arguably his crowning achievement, where he slips effortlessly into the mindset of Belli's Rome, a place supposedly a world away from contemporary Scotland. Of course, the success of the translations is due in part to the way Garioch highlights the similarities that do exist, but it is their success as sonnets which is most astonishing: his consistency in maintaining an already complex and unhelpful rhyme scheme and building his own work on that foundation marks these

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Charles Baxter, 18 May 1891. *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995, vol. 8, p. 290.

pieces out as, I would suggest, the metrical *tour de force* of twentieth century Scottish literature.

Such oppositions are, it goes without saying, convenient for those who subscribe to the cliché that Scottish culture is full of oppositions, but it serves to illustrate the breadth of Garioch's writing, a fact which is sometimes neglected but which is central to this thesis. Though it has generally concentrated on the poetry—*Jephthah and the Baptist* is rather more successful as poetry than it is as drama—and to a lesser degree to the prose which has connections to the poetry, it is important to point out that Garioch's activities as a writer extended also into other spheres: novelist (*Peter Potter*, the unpublished early novel), dramatist (*The Bluidy Hert*, a play set in the north-east of Scotland during the Renaissance, which appears to have been left unfinished but for which there were plans of a production with the involvement of Kenneth Elliott and Helena Mennie Shire, the two pioneering experts in the music of Scotland of that period),<sup>2</sup> autobiographer of a skilled and highly readable wartime memoir, anthologist (*Made in Scotland*, a 1975 Carcanet anthology of younger Scottish writers including Liz Lochhead, Billy Kay and Roderick Watson), reviewer and editor (*Scottish International Review*, *Brunton's Miscellany*). Not bad for someone with a third-class degree in English literature and a hopelessly uncongenial career in teaching.

But where stands Garioch's reputation today? There are several approaches to this question. Simplistically, one could tot up appearances in anthologies and the existence of critical literature, in which case a rather confusing picture would result. No critical monograph has been written on Garioch's work—a dubious distinction he shares even with his better known contemporaries such as Norman MacCaig and Sorley MacLean, and unlike those two writers he is also ignored by EUP's *Modern Scottish Writers* series (a volume on Garioch was planned, but came to nothing). After a flurry of interest after his death the market for critical articles seems to have dried up, though there are signs of an awakening of interest in the translations at least, to judge by Bill Findlay's recent article in *SLJ* and the two essays in his forthcoming book, while J. Derrick McClure's recent book *Language, Poetry and Nationhood* contains a chapter which deals with Garioch's poetry along with that of Douglas Young, Sydney Goodsir Smith and Tom Scott. Garioch is by no means alone in having suffered this kind of treatment—next to nothing has been written on MacCaig's poetry since his death, for example—and it is tempting to conclude that high activity on the poetry-reading circuit when a poet is alive is often mirrored by neglect after that poet has died.

Anthologists have been kinder to Garioch, though their selections show radically different conclusions about how they regard his work. One of the most interesting

<sup>2</sup> See NLS, MSS 26606–7.

examples of this is that two of Garioch's poems appear in Philip Larkin's *Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*, and these are poems in Scots, 'Heard in the Cougate' and 'I was Fair Beat', two of more impenetrable of the Edinburgh Sonnets (the former begins with the odd-looking line ' "Whu's aw thae fflag-poles ffor in Princes Street?" ').<sup>3</sup> This is interesting, not just because Garioch is the only Scots poet to be included in the book (and is included in preference to better known figures such as Edwin Morgan), but because the poems are explicitly contemporary and raucous: they do not fit into the stereotype of the traditional, Fergusson-like poet. Their inclusion is also ironic, of course, given the book's title, and while Andrew Motion mentions in his introduction to the 1997 reprint of the book that 'nobody—at OUP or in the eventual review-coverage—objected to the idea that "English verse" might be taken to include poetry from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. Today such a label would be likely to start a literary riot',<sup>4</sup> Larkin explains in a letter to Garioch that he 'should prefer to call it "British" verse, but the OUP says the word would upset the continuity of their titles'.<sup>5</sup> Even more interesting is Motion's revelation that Larkin took some persuading to include anything at all by Hugh MacDiarmid, 'to whom he had originally felt "so averse... that I can hardly bring my eyes to the page" '.<sup>6</sup> This contrast of opinion in the mind of the leading English poet of the time serves as an interesting sidelight on the vexed question of Garioch's relationship with MacDiarmid, a relationship which, as this thesis has shown, is not the straightforward question of mutual antagonism which it is often caricatured to be.

Later Scottish anthologists have shown a great deal of variety in their selection of Garioch's poetry. Douglas Dunn's selection includes the three poems which showcase Garioch's technical skill, 'Embroid to the Ploy', 'The Wire' and 'To Robert Fergusson' and six of the Edinburgh Sonnets, but also includes 'Property' [*CPW*, p.68], a thoughtful poem in English set in the desert of Garioch's wartime experience.<sup>7</sup> It is somewhat unexpected but very effective, and is a useful reminder that the breadth of Garioch's poetry is greater than might appear. Roderick Watson's selection contains a selection of seven Edinburgh Sonnets and two long poems, 'Lesson' [*CPW*, p.38] and 'The Big

<sup>3</sup> *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*, ed. Philip Larkin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973 (repr. 1997), p. 437. In the 1997 reprint Garioch's date of death is given erroneously throughout as 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Motion. Foreword to *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*, ed. Larkin, p. vi.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Philip Larkin, 19 March 1971. NLS, MS26563, fol. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Motion. Foreword to *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*, ed. Larkin, p. viii.

<sup>7</sup> *The Faber Book of Twentieth Century Scottish Poetry*, ed. Douglas Dunn. London: Faber and Faber, 1992 (repr. 1993).

Music', though his biographical sketch highlights the translations;<sup>8</sup> meanwhile, Simon Armitage and Robert Crawford's anthology of British poetry since 1945 includes only 'The Wire'.<sup>9</sup> Again, it is heartening that an anthology aimed at an audience furth of Scotland has chosen a poem in thick and difficult Scots, and it maybe suggests that if Garioch is to be introduced to a wider reading public it might be initially as a war poet. Indeed, Kenneth Baker's Faber anthology of war poetry includes several poems of Garioch's, all of them in English.<sup>10</sup> This is fitting since Garioch's first volume of poems was published jointly with Sorley MacLean, probably the leading Scottish war poet of this century. But whether he is portrayed as a war poet, as an accomplished translator, as a humorist, as an expert social satirist or—most important of all, I would suggest—as an outstanding verse craftsman, there is no doubt that if Garioch's reputation is to be enhanced and not left to wither on the vine then it is the breadth of that achievement which needs to be broadcast.

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<sup>8</sup> *The Poetry of Scotland: Gaelic, Scots and English*, ed. Roderick Watson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995, p. 588.

<sup>9</sup> *The Penguin Book of Poetry from Britain and Ireland since 1945*, ed. Simon Armitage and Robert Crawford. Harmondsworth: Viking, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> *The Faber Book of War Poetry*, ed. Kenneth Baker. London: Faber and Faber, 1997.

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Throughout the thesis and in the Bibliography, all references to Callum Macdonald's imprint—variously 'Loanhead: M. Macdonald', 'Edinburgh: M. Macdonald' and 'Edinburgh: Macdonald Publishers'—have been normalised to 'Edinburgh: Macdonald'.



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